The International Journal on School Disaffection

volume 4 number 1

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The only journal of its kind anywhere, this is a twice yearly publication that represents the perspectives of academics and practitioners working in the field of dropout prevention. It contains topical papers on issues and theories surrounding disaffection and the wide range of effective strategies, both individualised and structural, that are being used around the world to keep children from leaving school.

The purpose of the journal is to explore and share thinking and solutions and to raise awareness of the issues surrounding school disaffection. The research based papers are internationally refereed.

The journal is jointly published by the National Dropout Prevention Center of Clemson University, the National Dropout Prevention Network and Trentham Books of Stoke on Trent, England and has the support of a distinguished editorial board of academics and practitioners from around the world.

The International Journal on School Disaffection and the International Consortium on School Disaffection (ICSD) are closely associated with the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network at Clemson University, South Carolina.

The editor welcomes unsolicited submissions.
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The consortium, launched in 2002, is a world-wide multi-disciplinary group of academics, psychologists, researchers and practitioners working in the area of disaffection, run under the auspices of the National Dropout Prevention Centre.

Its rationale is to bring professionals together to discuss common concerns and challenges and to explore strategies, occasionally through exchanges.

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FOCUS: Manuscripts should be original works not previously published nor concurrently submitted for publication to other journals. Submissions should be written clearly and concisely for a diverse audience. The readership reflects the work of professionals conducting research on and/or working with disaffected children and young people throughout the world, i.e., school administrators, teachers, educational psychologists, mental health professionals, juvenile justice and youth workers, governmental agency leaders, researchers, and academics. The articles for the *IJSD* are a mix of academic and practical and include the voices of young people themselves from diverse cultural groups around the world who are or have been disengaged from school.

FORMAT: Manuscripts should follow the Harvard Style guidelines used by many international journals. Details can be found on the internet at http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~expos/sources/. Manuscripts should not exceed 4,000 words, including all cited references. Submissions will be internationally peer reviewed.

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A word from the editor

Reva Klein, London

The days are longer, the skies are bluer, the flips are flopping and the schoolkeeper can almost hear the silence. Yes, summer is in the air and with it, the promise of warmth, holidays, a brief respite from everyday routine and grind.

But for so many young people, getting through the obstacle course of exams and other end of year assessments can cast a dark cloud over the sunniest of skies. And for those on the periphery, for whom school is an inhospitable, unforgiving place, the hurdles can signify the last straw. The prospect of failure at worst or low attainment at best is hardly likely to spur troubled children and young people on to work hard. Instead, it could tip them over the edge.

The challenge of boosting such students' self-belief so that they are responsive to the learning process and at the same time resilient enough to withstand the blows that the learning environment inevitably deals is enormous, if not overwhelming.

One of the aims of this Journal is to exchange theory and practice on different approaches that address this challenge. The current issue is no exception. It contains a melange of articles that shine a light both on the issues faced by some global populations and on programmes and thinking designed to help overcome them.

The light that Crain Soudien shines on the realities of educational standards in 21st South Africa is a cold one and sure to dispel any shadows of doubt or glimmers of quick fixes for what is an endemic set of problems that will take considerable time to heal. He looks at the legacy of the long night of the apartheid years where, among other things, the low achievement of black children, even those from middle class backgrounds, refuses to shift ground.

The psychological state of Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URMS) is the subject of Tammy Bean and colleagues' paper from the Netherlands. In the current climate in the west, where the very terms refugees and asylum seekers are considered eupemisms for opportunists and liars, it's rather easy to forget the very real, very human experiences – often tragic – of people who have been forced to flee their countries

because of persecution. When they are young and flee on their own, those experiences can weigh very heavily, particularly when URMs attempt to put a brave face on things and soldier on in their new circumstances. This paper analyses the psychological realities behind the veneers of survival.

Of course, the concept of survival is relative: where URMs may be fleeing from armed conflict, the state of many of our inner cities demands a different kind of survival on the part of young people. The papers by Steve Edwards and Gethin Davis document two programmes that have been developed to bolster students' confidence, shift attitudes and raise attainment, both of which were originally designed in the US and are now being implemented in Britain.

The young people Simonetta Adamo and Amalia Aiello work with in a deprived district of Naples, Italy are survivors, too, being helped through their myriad social and emotional problems by attending the Chance experimental school scheme. There, the students, some of them violent and disruptive, are given opportunities to express – and transcend- their inner chaos creatively, collaboratively, emotionally.

For all of us who think *we've* got problems, Ingrid Sutherland of the UK Advisory Centre for Education makes us count our blessings. The organisation runs a parent helpline that all staff on the ACE collective take turns answering calls on. What they hear is a cross-section of issues and problems that encapsulate all that is wanting in the education system in Britain, in the US and elsewhere in the developed world.

And finally, Pulling No Punches features the story of Hakim, a 15 year old Londoner who is determined, despite his shaky grip on anger control and less than solid foundations in his school career, to make up for lost time.

As always, feedback and submissions of articles are greatly welcomed. Have a good summer!

Pulling no punches: Young people talk about their experiences at school

Hakim is a 15 year old boy of Somali descent. He lives with his mother, father, five brothers, three sisters and baby niece in public housing in a neighbourhood in east London renowned for its high density housing, high crime and low income families. A large proportion of inhabitants in the area are immigrants and refugees from Asia and Africa.

Two years ago, Hakim was excluded (expelled) from a local state-run Church of England school after he got into an argument with a teacher. 'I wanted to go to the toilet but he wouldn't listen. We started shouting at each other. And then I hit him.'

He admits that he's got a bit of an anger management issue. 'I get angry at the slightest thing. I would get into fights a lot with other students.' But despite his combative persona, he liked the school, where he thought he was doing 'okay' and where he had lots of friends. So when a letter arrived the next day informing him and his parents that he was excluded, he felt 'angry' and also worried about what would happen to him. They appealed against the decision: he wanted to go back just as much as his parents did. But their appeal was rejected and for four months, he was out of school as he waited for a place elsewhere. During that time he would occasionally go to alternative stop-gap provision but often he wouldn't bother and would just stay at home.

When he was notified that there was a place for him at the local alternative high school, he was less than keen. 'I'd heard rumours that it was a school for crazy, bad kids where they did bad things and didn't have to do any work.'

He went anyway just to have a look. He wasn't nervous, he says, because he knew a few of the boys there from his previous school. 'It was easy to fit in,' he says, and soon he found that it was fun.

The contrast with his previous school was striking. 'In my normal school, there'd be 30 people in a class and here, there are six max. The teachers are more concentrated and focused on you. They help me out and I can talk to them about different things, personal things sometimes. Some I can trust, some I can't'.

The different environment has worked in changing his attitude towards learning and his behaviour towards others. 'I can control myself better now. And in my previous school, I used to mess about a lot and have fun. But now, I feel like I just want to get on with my studies. My schoolwork's improved.'

Despite his improvements, he's not sure if this is the best place for him to be because of its reputation. But he says the teachers want him to stay on there for the next year to do his GCSEs, the series of end of school exams that will lead to further education. 'They say I'll be less nervous here and that I'll get through my exams more successfully.'

And doing well means a lot to him. He wants to go to college when he's finished school, like his older brothers and sisters have done. From the angry, out of control boy who wasn't getting attention at his previous school and never thought about the consequences of his actions, he's become focused on getting decent grades that will allow him to move on. Where to, he doesn't have a clue, but he knows that staying angry means staying in trouble – and that's not what Hakim aspires to these days.

Disaffected or displaced? A brief analysis of the reasons for academic failure amongst young South Africans

Professor Crain Soudien
University of Cape Town
South Africa

For the last four years I have been involved with the design, administration and writing up of the results of competency tests which have been conducted for Grades 3 (ages 8-9)and 6 (ages 11-12) in my home province of the Western Cape, South Africa[1]. In the course of this work, I and some of my colleagues working on this project have had to suppress an extreme jumble of emotions, as we have had to confront the terrible reality that South Africa's children are abjectly failing at the most basic levels in their reading and writing in ways that raise profound questions. Why is it that this country, often described as an upper-middle income country, and which has in the last ten years gone through such enormous changes for the better, has so little to show educationally for all the efforts that have been put into social improvement?

This essay begins with a review of a range of results from recent competency tests, opening up the question of what lines of enquiry we might begin to explore to account for South Africa's young people appearing to be in such difficulty. Schooling outcomes, and particularly attainment results, cannot begin to capture the complexity of who we are as human beings and what it is that we know and do not know. Neither can they explain the real incommensurability of dominated systems of knowledge in relation to hegemonic knowledge regimes. I am aware of the debates around testing and their deployment in gender, class and racial settings and the kinds of social profiling to which their outcomes are put. I am also aware of the scepticism that has made itself felt in the United States with regard to the educational value of tests carried out state level (see, *inter alia*, Jones, 1996, 15; Burstein, *et al*, 1996-1996 and Koretz and Deibert, 1995-1996). At the same time, I am not so naïve as to pretend that because the tests are flawed and the testing process might be suspect, that we should disregard what they have to say when the data is there to analyse. While I too am sceptical about testing for testing's sake, and share much of the criticism that surrounds the use of data of this nature, I think that we in South Africa would be foolish to ignore the signs that are beginning to emerge in the country around learning performance.

Damning Data

So what is this data and what is it saying? At the national level a number of tests have been conducted and are currently underway. The first results emerged from a study carried out as part of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) in 1994/1995 (Howie, 2001:12). South Africa was one of 41 countries that completed the study, the only African country in the list. This study worked with 15,000 students in over 400 schools distributed around the country. The study was repeated in 1998 in 37 countries in what came to be known as TIMSS-R. While an important core of countries remained from the first iteration of this study, the second involved, significantly, a number of countries with similar developing-economy profiles to South Africa. TIMSS-R in South Africa involved more than 8,000 Grade 8 learners from more than 220 schools distributed around the country (Howie, 2001:14).

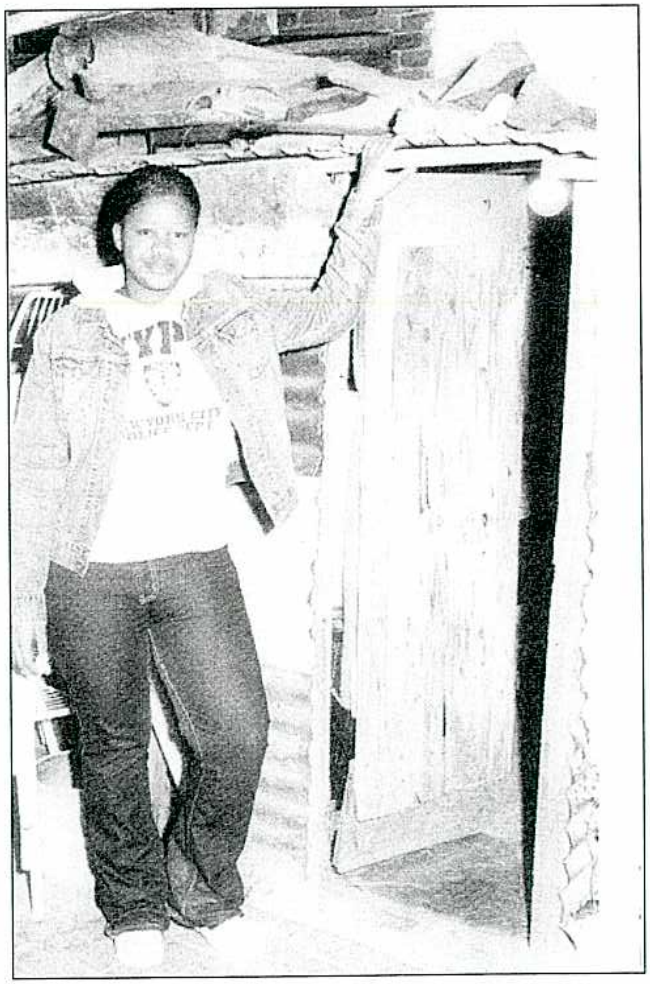
In the 1990s, a consortium consisting of 15 southern African countries called the Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) came into being (http://www.sacmeq.org) and, in two waves, carried out a series of benchmarked tests amongst a number of countries in the region. SACMEQII was conducted between 2000 and 2003 and involved South Africa.

In the Western Cape, four waves of tests were carried out among grade 3 (8 and 9 year old) and grade 6 (11-12 year old) students involving every single school in the province in which there were more than 50 students in a year group. In each wave over 30,000 students were tested.

There are two dimensions of these results, overall, that are noteworthy and that, I suggest, point us to the core of the South African situation. The first is that in relation to other countries with similar socio-economic profiles, South African children are performing far worse; and the second is that children from black middle-class backgrounds in South Africa perform more like their working-class black than their middle-class white counterparts.

The TIMSS and TIMSS-R studies provided the first shock. Significantly, there were few differences between the levels of attainment in mathematics between the first and second studies. While there was a drop in performance in the outcomes of the second study relative to the first, the difference was not statistically significant. In both studies, the attainment of South African pupils came last in the list of 39 countries performing, in the TIMSS-R, a mean score of 275 out of a possible total of 800 marks (Howie, 2001:18). This mark was considerably below the international mean of 487 and significantly below comparable countries such as Morocco, Tunisia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia and Chile. Significantly, the best performing pupils in South Africa scored at the level of the mean of pupils in leading countries in the list such as Singapore; but fewer than 0.5% of South Africa's pupils featured in the international top 10% benchmark (Howie, 2001:19). The mean attainment for science was even lower than for maths, with South African pupils scoring at the level of 243 (in relation to the international mean of 488) (Howie, 2001:22).

Results were little different in the SACMEQII project. On the basis of a pre-determined mean of 500 points, the results in the SACMEQ South Africa study of Grade 6 learners show 'that for South Africa overall, the Grade 6 learners performed notably better in reading



(mean Rasch score of 492.4) than in mathematics (mean Rasch score of 486.2)[1]. However, both mean scores were below the pre-determined mean Rasch score of 500' (Moloi and Strauss, 2005, 65). This mean value, it should be noted, is unrelated to an actual level of competence and does not signify anything other than an arithmetic value.

Giving substance to these figures are descriptions of children's levels of competency for reading and mathematics. For reading, the lowest level of competence was denoted as *Level 1: 'Pre-Reading'* which required that the learner: '**Locates familiar words in a short (one line) text. Matches words to pictures. Uses letters to identify unknown words. Follows short and familiar instructions.**' For mathematics, the fourth level of competence was denoted as *Level 4: 'Beginning Problem Solving'* which described the overarching competence like this: **Analyzes a visual or verbal prompt in order to count. Recognizes shape, number, and time. Uses a single familiar basic operation (add, subtract, multiply, or divide) in simple problem solving'**] (Moloi and Strauss, 2005, 67).

The Moloi and Strauss report ascertained that the modal competence level for reading for Grade 6 learners in South Africa was at Level 3 (Basic Reading) and was achieved by 19.1 percent of the learners in the study (Moloi and Strauss, 2005, 67). Only 26% of the learners could read above a Level 4 standard (independent reading). In mathematics, the modal level of attainment for Grade 6 learners was Level 2 (Emergent Numeracy), which was attained by 44.4 percent of the learners: '(i)n addition, there were 7.8 percent of the learners who achieved only Level 1 (Beginning Numeracy). All together this left less than 50 percent of the learners reaching competence levels higher than Emergent Numeracy' (Moloi and Strauss, 2005, 68-69).

The tests in the Western Cape Education Department amongst 34, 596 Grade 6 learners showed similar, if not worse, outcomes:

i) 15.6%, or 5, 243 out of those tested, passed the numeracy test at the Grade 6 level,

ii) only 35% passed the literacy test at the Grade 6 level, and

iii) 63.3% of the learners failed both tests at the Grade 6 level (Western Cape Education Department Media Release, 25 May 2004).[2]

National Tests carried out on Grade 3 learners produced similar results to the Western Cape tests. The 2001 national Grade 3 systemic assessment (the final report appeared in 2003) showed that the average score for numeracy was 30% and for literacy 54% (2003:24).

Even without comprehensive testing, there have been warning signals appearing throughout the system. Most prominent and most public of these have been the results of the Grade 12 Senior Certificate exit examinations. From 1994 to 1999 the results showed a marked decline, from a 58% to a 49% pass rate, with only 12% of the candidates qualifying for university entrance in 1999. There has been a largely unexplained increase since then to a pass rate of 73% in 2003 and a 19% university entrance pass (Taylor *et al.*, 2003: 10). This increase is unexplained in the sense that that there is little systemic evidence to show why this has been the case.

What this evidence points to is that performance maps closely onto the country's racial and class demographics. The data, most clearly seen in the Western Cape results, and confirmed by the SACMEQ tests, shows that while the entire cohort of current learners in the system is under-performing, there are large disparities between the performance of poor and black children, and these two variables themselves can be disaggregated to show similar performance profiles.

Van der Berg, (2005:65) who had analysed the SACMEQII data, makes the argument that the extent of inequality in educational outcomes between South African schools is far greater than for any other of the countries in the sample '*and is much higher than for most other studies worldwide. A selection of almost 50 such national surveys around the world reveals a median value of 0.25 for the intra-class correlation coefficient for reading, whereas South Africa's value is 0.70.*' He makes the point that this reflects the extent of inequality between rather than within schools.

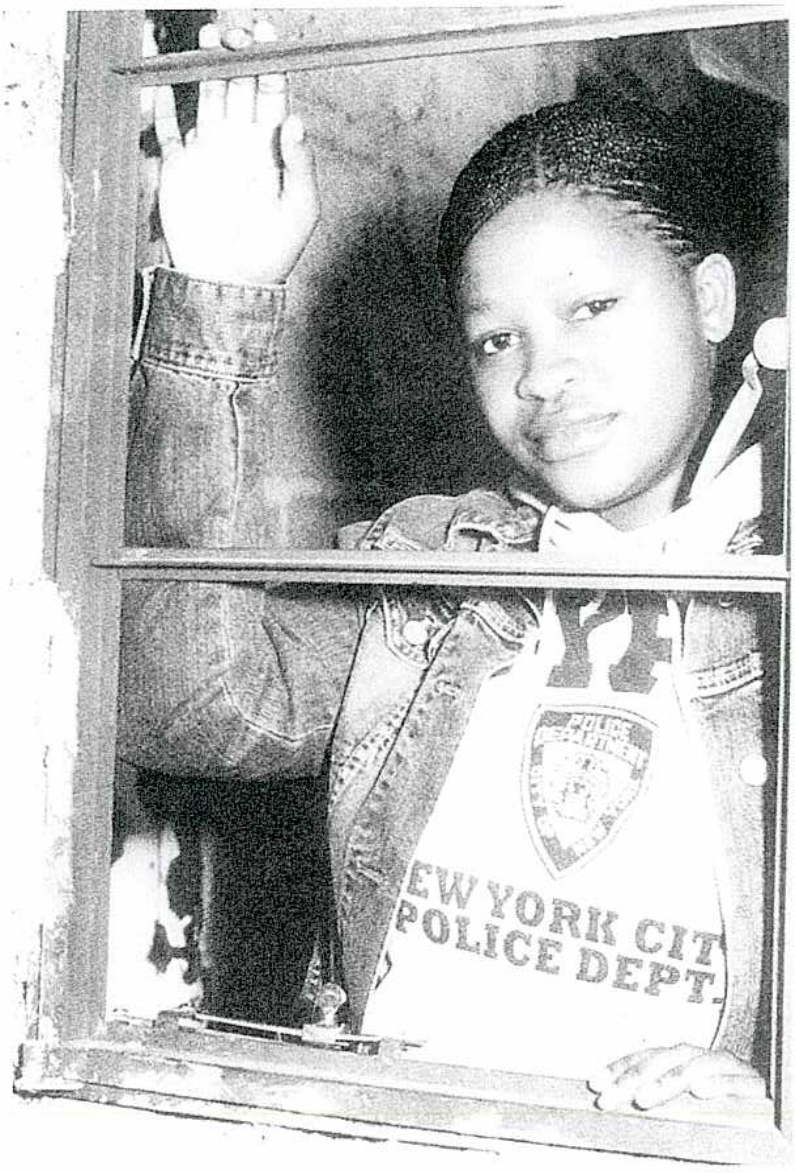
More disconcerting than these disparities, as the SACMEQII studies show, is the fact that children 'in poor (historically black) schools,... with a middle-class background perform as poorly as their less well-off fellow students' (Van der Berg, 2005:65). Put differently, without its racial overlay, children from the middle-income group perform more like poor children than like children from affluent backgrounds.

It is in this basic reality, I want to argue, that the essential puzzle of South Africa's youth challenges lies. Why is it, unlike in most other places in the world, that socio-economic status only 'kicks in' at very high levels? Why is it, as the SACMEQII data shows, that socio-economic status improves one's learning chances only moderately at the middle-class level? These are deeply puzzling questions. They have been addressed in a number of ways. The most audible response, as far as the public is concerned, is the answer provided by Jansen (2005), who has argued that South Africa has failed its young through the neglect of what are essentially the managerial matters of schooling, teachers, textbooks and time: 'One way to explain the puzzle of increasing investments in national education without a corresponding increase in student achievement... is to track the lack of concentrated and co-ordinated management of these three key factors: teachers, textbooks and time' (Jansen, 2005:73).

Valuable as this approach is, I want to suggest here that it does not deal with the problem posed above, which is the difference between South Africa and its comparable international counterparts, and the difference between South Africa's affluent populace and the rest of the country's social strata. While the issues of teachers, text-books and time go a long way to explain the South African situation, it does so only in what one might call a symptomatic way. What lies behind the symptoms is what we need to understand.

Towards a social analysis of the academic failure of South Africa's children

In attempting to account for failure in the academic domain, a great deal of current commentary is neglecting the extent to which the social realities of South Africa continue to influence, shape and even determine the life as it is lived and experienced both by groups and individuals in the country. The school, as any sociology primer for education will point out, is in some ways able to insulate itself from the rest of society and can, on some occasions, produce an internal and self-referential environment for itself, but it is extremely difficult for its inhabitants to live independently of the wider world. It is more likely to be the case that it exists in a *dependent* relationship with that wider world. This is the case, I want to suggest, for South Africa, where the kind of failure that one is seeing in the schools is the cumulative product of extensive and deep sociological realities that are



brought into the school and held in conversation with the school through the children and their teachers.

Why children are failing in South Africa cannot be understood independently of the country's history, which continues to be reproduced and exemplified in the lives of schoolchildren and their teachers. This history constitutes a complex patchwork of race, class, gender, patriarchy, age and language; it is experienced in schools as deep sociological realities that are replicated and resisted, interpreted and managed by teachers and pupils every day of their lives. And out of this sociological space emerges young people who carry the marks of their history.

Coming to terms with the continuing poverty that blights young lives in South Africa is critical in making sense of the significance of these effects. Streak (c2000) argues that the poverty rate for children under the age of 17 in 1999 in the Western Cape, the second richest province in the country, was of the order of 25.3%. A large-scale longitudinal study conducted by the Centre for Social Science Research at the University of Cape Town, called the Cape Area Panel Study, emphasizes this point but also shows how much 'population group' – a synonym for 'race' – and class overlap. The study's lead authors explain (Lam and Seekings, 2005:20):

> *Almost two-thirds of African households are in the bottom third of the income distribution, whilst more than three-quarters of white households are in the top third. The coloured population, however, spans a wider range of incomes, from the very poor... to the rich. Of the 10 per cent of households in Cape Town that can be said to be living in deep poverty, more than one quarter are coloured (and the rest are African); of the additional 15% of households who might be said to live in mid poverty, about four-tenths are coloured (and the rest African).*

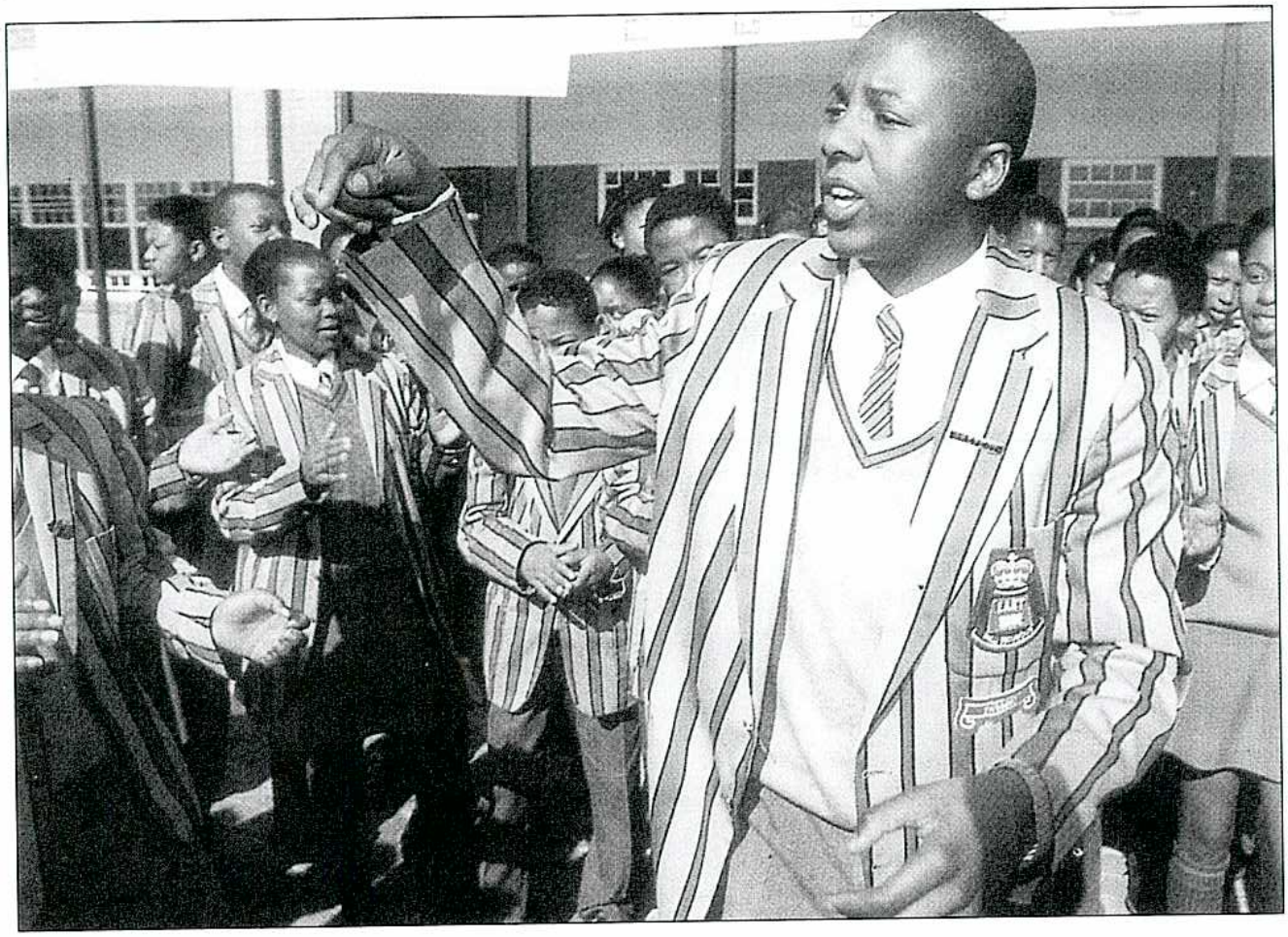
A colleague working at a development agency drew attention to the disparities experienced by black children. He said:

> *Huge disparities exist between former (white) Model C schools and [black] township and rural schools, which are often no more than warehouses or sinkholes where almost half drop out. In these schools, maths and science as well as literacy are way below par. Teacher morale is poor; they suffer policy overload and ill discipline, many lack training and few newcomers enter the profession.... For 60% to 80% of learners, [substandard] education condemns them to a life of poverty and exclusion on the margins of the second economy. They are overwhelmingly poor and black.* (Bloch, 2005)

The consequences of this situation, I want to argue, is that we now have before us a generation of extremely vulnerable young people. This vulnerability is evident in the lack of school attainment, but it is also evident in the extreme forms of social anomie that are evident amongst young people. Examples of this anomie abound in local newspapers with numerous stories and reports highlighting the extent of young people's involvement in serious criminal activity. Recently Cape Town experienced the shock of the tragic killing of a baby by a group of young people who had been hired off the street by another young woman. The alleged killers were a boy of sixteen, another just over eighteen and an older male. The woman who allegedly hired the young men was only 23 years old herself. Complicating the story was the fact that the young woman was white and the alleged killers unemployed black men. Another recent incident involved two young boys who were killed in a Cape Town township by a gang said to be in their mid-teens. In July of 2005, an eye-witness to the killing of yet another young boy, allegedly by teenagers, remarked to the *Cape Argus* (July 29, 2005) that the shooters did not even bother to run away from the scene: 'They just walked away, and took a shell from the gun and threw it into the road.' In 1999 Tony Weaver and Sarah Borchert described the situation as follows for young people (http://www.cyc-net.org/cyc-online/cycol-0999-youthjustice1.htm)

> *Youth – under the age of 35 – are responsible for more than half of reported crime in South Africa. In the Western Cape alone, 65 percent of all youth are classified as being disorganised: meaning they are not attached to any educational, social or cultural institution. At least 60, 000 young people in the region owe allegiance to gangs. More than 2,600 youth, aged 7 to 17, are in jail across South Africa on charges ranging from petty theft to gang rape, hijacking and murder. An enduring image, seen repeatedly in the local media, is of a tattooed young person with a 'Doggy Dog' leering at the camera exuding evil.*

These issues are compounded by the structural realities of urban and rural life in South Africa. Young people under the age of 19 currently make up half of the South African population (Reddy, *et al*, 2003:11). The composition of South African households, dominated as they are by young people, shows that the ratio of older to young people in poor communities drops as low as 1:10 in some instances. The implications for the socialization of young people in these circumstances are dire, with young people not having good access to significant older figures in their lives able to pass on to them the social mores and social identities that define their community. As a result, they fall prey to the kinds of situations captured in the incidents cited above. Moreover, there is the puzzle of why young people in what would be described as middle-class situations are more like their very poor peers than their affluent ones and why the degree of vulnerability experienced by very poor people continues to percolate into the lives of the middle-class. It remains a fact that these children,



especially black middle-class children, retain their social and physical proximity to the malaise that besets township life, including the poor schools that township children are compromised by. While elements of their lives might have improved materially, they still have to deal with the reality that ubiquitous in their world is the kind of breakdown in family structures and support networks that produces vulnerability that the very poor have to deal with (Soudien, 2003).

It is important to stress that overviews such as these, and the way they are reported, can easily have the effect of pathologising youth behaviour in South Africa. Addressing this, it is necessary to stress that not all young people in South Africa lead lives such as these. There is enough evidence (see Soudien, forthcoming) to show that levels of participation in religious, social and sporting activities among young people are significant. They demonstrate high aspirational levels: they want to achieve (see Soudien, 2003). But, by the same token, the reality cannot be wished away that poor and black children are especially vulnerable. And this vulnerability is compounded by an educational system that is not geared to deal with their needs.

The thrust of educational reforms in South Africa has had the effect of producing a system profoundly geared towards a kind of middle-class universalism, embodied in the centrepiece of educational reform in the country: the South African Schools' Act of 1996. In giving the process of school reform in South Africa its particular character, the Act has largely misread the country's young people, failing to recognize in them the profound vulnerability that characterizes youth life in the country.

The learning-subject – the young student as invoked in the Act- is defined in terms of middle-class singularity. Formally the Act describes the young person not as a student or a pupil, but significantly as a learner. This learner is 'any person receiving or obliged to receive education' (SASA, 1996:4). This definition gives the very diverse group of young people in South Africa a singularity and a unity that does not encapsulate who

they are. If we are to understand 'unities' as implying a bringing together of what was not previously unified, then the learner clearly cannot be understood to be an innocent representation of the 'learning' subject. Instead, he/she has to be understood as a moment, or a subject, which, as Bhabha (1994:8) says, is 'blasted out of the continuum of history.'

The conditions that have led to the production of this term of the 'learner' in the Act, I believe, are located inside the history of learning in South Africa, particularly in the detachment of the learning-subject from the very act of what has traditionally and conventionally been understood as learning. The conditions which currently prevail in South African schools and which have emerged from the country's almost 25 year long experience of the decomposition of formal schooling have been pre-eminently about the displacement of the learning-subject in the traditional couplet of teacher-learner and, indeed, the evolution of very different teacher-learner arrangements. Dating from the time of the student uprisings in the late 1970s, some schools had the very shape and rhythm of their school days influenced by their students. The learner-subject in that period had to take on rights and responsibilities which had traditionally been the preserve of others, such as teachers, parents, elders and so on. Pupils, for example, had in various ways and forms assumed the responsibility of determining the length of the school day, what qualities are desirable in a teacher and, even, what should be taught. They had, thus, been primary agents in the process of defining the character of the modern South African school. They positioned the school as a site for political socialization and the taking on of political responsibility (see Gilmour and Soudien, 1998). Out of this history have come learning-subjects who have rewritten the laws and codes of schooling and who have effectively taken upon themselves the responsibilities of controlling the educational space of the school and specifying its character and mission.

The present Act has assumed the historic task of decentring and displacing the role that young people had held in South Africa's recent history. Read ideologically, one might say the objective of the Act is to tame what it perceives to be the radical element in young people's identities. In taming them, I contend that it has misread their complexity and in particular their vulnerability, and instead, bestowed on them a coherent middle-class identity that they do not have.

It is here that a long process of recovery needs to begin in the country. If the country is to understand why its children are failing it needs to understand who they are much more closely. At present the system is defined to misunderstand young people and their needs structurally. There is a need to acknowledge and analyse the deep and complex conditions that produce the kinds of life-worlds that young people are experiencing, the sheer scale of physical deprivation and the extent to which this deprivation impedes learning. This is a basic tenet of social improvement. Hungry children cannot learn. The physical realities that surround children hound them as they make their way from the impoverished worlds of their townships to the equally impoverished surrounds of their schools.

But critically, the cultural impoverishment of young people matters just as much. With the collapse of systems of care in the townships and the large-scale dislocation that has happened between generations as a result of the development of urbanization and migrant labour in South Africa, young people have lost the security of identity that would have come through stable family and generational structures. This security has been replaced by systems of peer-determined social structures, significant amongst which are the gangs phenomenon, which have provided social networks for young people that are not in alignment with the processes and the objectives of school. Young people fail, therefore, because their material, cultural and social environments are at odds with the orderliness of the school. It is out of this, I suggest, that a more encompassing explanation for academic failure might emanate.

Notes

1 The process of conducting this test, such as the development of the sample, and analysing the results, is described in the report by Moloi and Strauss, 2005. However, the full results are available on the SACMEQ website www.sacmeq.org/indicate.htm.

2 The full results are contained in a report of the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) entitled 'Grade 6 Learner Assessment Study 2003.' This report can be accessed through the offices of the Research Division of the WCED. Please note that figures cited here have been made public through media statements released by the WCED.

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Keeping students engaged in school through the UK-I-Can Program

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Research has demonstrated that students who take responsibility for their successes and failures achieve higher levels of academic achievement, experience reduced incidents of behavioral problems and are less likely to drop out of school (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

UK-I-Can Program as a Replication of the AMER-I-CAN Program

The UK-I-Can Program is an adaptation of the Amer-I-Can Program, introduced in 1988 to help individuals meet their full potential and improve the quality of their lives. The focus of the program is equipping young people with life management skills necessary to lead fulfilling and productive lives, based on the belief that individuals' self-esteem is raised only when they improve their lives and achieve success through self determination (Edwards and Edwards 2003).

Since the inception of the Amer-I-Can Program in 1988, tens of thousands of people from a variety of settings including public and private schools, alternative schools, juvenile detention centers, adult prisons and youth training facilities have completed the training. Independent evaluations of the program in the United States have documented academic and behavioral improvements among students, along with a greater connectedness to school and a reduction in school dropouts.

In 2005, the Amer-I-Can curriculum was adapted to meet the cultural and academic needs of the United Kingdom, and was piloted as the UK-I-Can Program at St. Benedict Catholic School in Derby, England. This article highlights the results of that pilot project and the impacts of the UK-I-Can Program on a sample of 30 students at that school. These findings will have implications for further implementation in schools in the United Kingdom.

Components of the UK-I-CAN Curriculum

UK-I-Can is a 60 hour, 15 chapter self-improvement and life skills training program. Between February 1, 2005 and May 24, 2005, it provided life management skills training for 30 youths aged 13 in Year 8 at Saint Benedict Catholic School and Performing Arts College in Derby, England, a government funded school for students aged 11-19. The 30 UK-I-Can participants

were divided into three groups and received training in classes that lasted 60 minutes a day, five days a week for 14 weeks.

Two facilitators for each group were selected by school administrators as trusted individuals who would bring invaluable experience and ability in reaching at-risk youth. The facilitators were trained by Amer-I-Can staff, who helped them understand how to use the UK-I-Can Program to equip students with the tools to better manage their lives, improve their attitudes and enhance their academic, social and emotional development.

The UK-I-Can curriculum addresses seven critical areas:

- Motivation, habits and attitudes
- Goal setting
- Problem solving and decision making
- Emotional control
- Family relations
- Financial stability
- Effective communication

The program emphasizes the following overarching objectives throughout the course and teaches participants to:

- Develop greater self-esteem, assume responsible attitudes and experience a restructuring of habits and conditioning processes;
- Develop an appreciation of family members and an understanding of the role family structure has in achieving successful living;
- Develop an understanding of the concept of community and collective responsibility;
- Develop capabilities in problem solving and decision making that will eliminate many of the difficulties that were encountered in past experiences;
- Develop competency in money management and financial stability, thus relieving pressures that have contributed to previous difficulties;
- Develop communication skills to express thoughts and ideas better, while acquiring an understanding of and respect for the ideas of others; and
- Acquire employment-seeking and retention skills to improve chances of long-term, gainful employment.

Methodology

This evaluation addresses the progress of students at the school that received UK-I-Can training and aftercare services between February 1, 2005 and May 27, 2005, drawing on both quantitative and qualitative methods including: student work and effort averages; attendance; documented incidents of misbehavior; pre and post teacher, parent, and student surveys; facilitator's comments and daily progress notes from case management files; and post-program interviews with participants, facilitators, school administrators, and parents.

Thirty students were selected by school administration based on absenteeism, misbehavior, and poor academic performance. This group was viewed by teachers and administration as highly disengaged from school and at risk of further school failure and potentially dropping out of school. The data collected from the three groups was used to determine the impact of the UK-I-Can Program on these disaffected students.

Results and Discussion

Of the 30 students selected to participate in the UK-I-Can pilot program, 29 completed the entire course, which represents a 97% completion rate. The quantitative and qualitative data collected on the 29 students was used to assess progress in five areas: quality of work, effort, behavior, attendance and life management skills. Each is discussed in greater detail below.

Quality of Work

To determine the work habits of students in the UK-I-Can program, teachers were asked to complete a survey prior to and after completing the program. The teachers were asked to rate the students' work habits on the following five point scale:

1 = Consistently produces work of a high standard

2 = Usually produces good work

3 = Produces work of a satisfactory standard

4 = Produces work which is a little below standard

5 = Performs at a level which causes concern

The average score for students prior to the program was 3.19; following the program, students' work scores averaged 2.68, which is an overall improvement of 16%. One teacher reported changes in a student's work in his academic classes: 'I fill an IEP sheet for every lesson I have with him and can compare his effort in lessons from subject to subject. Looking at the sheets and also seeing for myself, I can say that he appreciates his lessons more and takes them seriously. He takes part and tries harder without a doubt.' One student commented, 'I've improved my school work and my listening skills and am more confident.' Another said, 'I'm doing better in my lessons and am listening better.'

Some conclusions of teachers and facilitators:

'All participants are showing a desire to improve [their school work]. Several teachers have said that they have noticed positive improvements in the participants' approaches to their lessons.'

'One student showed a growing sense of maturity in his problem solving of issues we discussed. We saw his ability to control his behavior and to actively listen improve. He was able to successfully transfer these skills into many of his lessons.'

'Another student no longer absconds from lessons and appears to be engaging fully with educational opportunities provided.'

'The overall progress of the participants is pleasing. Average grade scores for both effort and work produced have certainly improved for all of the participants, with huge improvements by two of the students, as noted in the statistics.'

In follow-up interviews with 19 of the 30 UK-I-Can participants conducted six months after students completed the program, many commented on their academic gains as a result of skills they acquired during the UK-I-Can program:

- *'My grades are improving'*
- *'I am more confident in my lessons'*
- *'Good behavior leads to good grades'*
- *'I am doing a lot better in math because I have changed my attitude'*
- *'I have gotten better in my lessons – top scores on tests'*
- *'I am better able to do my homework'*

Four parents participated in the follow-up interviews, which were also conducted six months after students completed the program. Of the four, three parents felt that their children improved academically during the UK-I-Can program and that they continued to exhibit increased motivation toward schoolwork.

One interpretation of the data on students' quality of work is that the interpersonal skills learned in the UK-I-Can program generalized to the academic requirements of school. In other words, the students who learned better self-control, communication and behavior from the program were then able to transfer these skills to academic endeavors.

Effort

Student effort was also measured by teachers prior to and after completing the program. The teachers were again asked to rate the students' effort on the following five point scale:

1 = Exceptional effort according to pupil's own standard

2 = Good effort

3 = Satisfactory effort

4 = Insufficient effort or commitment

5 = Poor effort giving cause for concern

The average score for students' effort prior to the program was 3.09. Following the program, students' average effort score was a 2.59, which represents an improvement of 16%. Six months after completing the program, students' responses continued to reflect gains they made during the program. For example, when asked what different decisions or choices they make now as a result of what they learned in the program, students offered the following answers:

- *'I buckle down, work harder, and get on with it'*
- *'I work harder and behave better in my classes'*
- *'I get more involved in class – raise my hand'*
- *'I try harder in class'*
- *'I keep my room tidy, help the family, do better in my lessons'*
- *'I set goals for my tests and school work'*

Some of the parents also noted sustained levels of effort in their children: 'Her added motivation helps her understand and accept consequences for things like not going to school,' said one. Another commented: 'She takes more responsibility to get to school on her own.' The results of the data measuring students' effort are closely connected to those of quality of work. Improving in one area (increased effort, greater sense of personal responsibility, etc.) leads to improvements in other areas (academics, behavior, etc.). Students also appeared to connect effort to achievement: the more effort they exerted, the greater the reward (positive interactions with teachers and peers, better grades, etc.). Motivational theory would suggest that for students to be intrinsically motivated, two conditions need to exist: students need to perceive they are competent to complete a task successfully and students need to perceive they are in control (Spaulding, 1992). Both conditions were met in the constructs of the UK-I-Can program, which explains students' increased effort on both academic and social tasks.

Behavior

Formal, documented incidents of behavior that required administrative attention were tracked for three months before starting the program, and for three months following completion of the program. Prior to the UK-I-Can program, 77 behavior incidents were documented for the 29 students. After completing the program, 70 behavioral incidents were recorded, representing a 9% overall improvement in behavior. During the program, one parent noticed dramatic improvements in his child's behavior: 'The UK-I-Can initiative has been a success in promoting self-belief and good behavior. He has shown marked improvement in all areas.' Another parent stated, 'I think this program has done our son some good. He seems to be calmer and has better control over his frustrations.' The teacher of this student concurred: 'He used to find it very hard to separate himself from peers who dragged him down, but now he can do this with ease. Though he may not sit far away from them, he has learnt to isolate himself.' Other parents and teachers noted improvements in behavior. One teacher stated that a participant in the UK-I-Can program 'has worked hard to avoid situations and behaviors which were previously keeping him after school in detention.' Another student's teacher noted that she 'has received less detention/incident slips regarding his behavior.' A parent, commenting on her child's behavior prior to and during the UK-I-Can program, had this to say: 'Before participating in UK-I-Can, his behavior was quite bad. He was always fighting with other students and would then return home very moody and aggressive. He would then be very cruel to his younger siblings. Since taking part in the program, I think that he has presented himself very well and I am really proud that he no longer fights.' A facilitator stated: 'Behaviorally, we got some very positive feedback from teachers on improvements; some saw marked improvement in their classes.'

Students themselves noticed improvements in personal behavior. Here is a cross-section of comments:

> *'It [the UK-I-Can program] has helped me control my temper, and I haven't hit anyone at school since.'*
>
> *'I have more control over by behavior in class and towards my work.'*
>
> *'I used to get angry a lot, especially in lessons that I wasn't good at. I haven't walked out of a lesson for ages, I don't shout at lunch, and haven't had to stay after school for ages ... I can now control myself better.'*
>
> *'Since UK-I-Can, I'm able to cooperate with the teachers more and now I do more of what I'm told to do. I listen to what I'm told now; I didn't before. I've started to learn from my mistakes.'*

Although there were improvements in behavior in some students, the fewest gains overall (only a 9% improvement) were made in this regard. In fact, at the start of the UK-I-Can program, a few facilitators, parents, and teachers even noted some increases of misbehavior: 'A marked deterioration in her behavior coincided with the start of the UK-I-Can course,' was what one parent stated. A facilitator likewise observed an increase in misbehavior at the start of the program: 'We used detentions to measure improvement in behavior, and some detentions actually increased.' One likely explanation for the increase of misbehavior could be explained by the 'Implementation Dip,' where performance dips upon the introduction of new skills (Fullan, 2004). Over time, however, students adapt to the new skills and assimilate them into their daily functioning. When this happens, the implementation dip levels out and students are able to operate more successfully.

The difficulty of sustaining gains in behavior over a long period of time was acknowledged as a problem. During the six month post-pilot interviews, one parent noted: 'There are occasions when we see an improvement in his behavior, but this is not sustained for a long period of time.' Another parent commented that, 'During the program, he was excellent. Now he's not. During the program and for a short while afterward, I saw a tremendous change. Now I see him slipping again and see some of the same bad behaviors again.' One of the most likely explanations for this is the removal of the students' support system. The UK-I-Can program offered students a daily block of time devoted to problem-solving, discussion, peer and teacher support and stress reduction. Students selected for this program had experienced repeated failure and had, in many cases, disassociated themselves from school altogether. While they were in the program, they received services that helped them to achieve and improve but once those services stopped, former bad habits were more likely to resurface. Altering deep-rooted patterns of behavior requires sustained interventions.

Although incidents of misbehavior were documented, it is interesting to note explanations offered by students themselves. Six months after the program, one student commented that although he continued to get into trouble, he now understood the connection between behavior and consequence, and did not blame others for his misbehavior. Many other students commented that although they were still struggling with past habits and patterns of misbehavior, they at least were able to take some personal responsibility for their actions. A common statement during the post-pilot interview was 'I still misbehave, but now I know that I get myself into trouble.' The great majority of students said that they could connect consequences to misbehaviors. The school headteacher/principal concurred that, although data revealed only a slight decrease in incidents of misbehavior, 'there seems to be a greater awareness of misbehavior, and a greater respect for others now.' 97% of students interviewed six months after completing the program commented that some type of formal, structured, on-going support, such as meeting once a week, would provide them with enough assistance to maintain the gains they made during the program. Implementing a structured system of on-going support would ensure a higher level of sustainability for the UK-I-Can program.

When asked to describe what they learned about themselves from the UK-I-Can program six months earlier, most students discussed personal behavior:

- 'Talking back, not handling my behavior'
- 'My bad behavior in class'
- 'Misbehavior-messing around in my classes'
- 'My behavior in class was poor'
- 'I need better behavior and attitude'
- 'I was learning how to act and behave'
- 'That I need to stop calling out'
- 'That there is no point in misbehaving'
- 'I need to learn how to react'
- 'I see things that I didn't see before about my behavior'

Significantly reducing incidents of misbehavior involves repeated, long-term reconditioning. By this point in school, students have spent years developing habits and patterns of behavior that are difficult to change. However, it is important to note that although behavior issues persisted, students, facilitators, parents, and even administrators stated that there was a greater sense of responsibility for misbehavior.

Attendance

Students' attendance was tracked prior to the program and during the 14 week program period. Prior to the program, school attendance records reflected a total of 376 absences for the 29 participants. During the program, participants were absent 279 times, representing a 26% improvement in school attendance. At the beginning of the program, two facilitators expressed concern over poor attendance: 'Attendance for some of our participants remains a cause for concern. One participant missed six sessions due to a skiing vacation. The group average for sessions is currently at 85%. We hope to improve this by focusing on individual responsibility.'

Six months after completing the program, parents were pleased that their children were still motivated to come to school. One parent stated: 'She is still better about coming to school and doing her work. She is also more confident.' Another parent said, 'Her added motivation helps her understand and accept consequences for things like not going to school.' This

feeling was echoed by another parent, who said of her son: 'He now wants to come to school. His attendance has improved so much so that I wish the program was on-going for him.'

Increased attendance both during and after the program can be directly related to the relationships students formed in the course of it. Research has shown that a significant motivator for a student to attend school is a caring relationship with at least one person (Fredriken and Rhodes, 2004). Spending 14 weeks with other students from similar circumstances and facilitators who worked hard to establish relationships and unify a team spirit gave many of these students a good reason to come to school. Increasing attendance alone can lead to greater success in school and the more success students experience in school, the greater their intrinsic motivation to attend.

Life Management Skills

The Life Management Skills surveys were completed by participants, their parents, teachers, and facilitators prior to and after completing the program. Each group rated the students' skills in the seven critical areas addressed in the UK-I-Can curriculum (motivation, habits, and attitudes; goal setting; problem solving and decision making; emotional control; family relationships; financial stability; and effective communication) on a five point rating scale:

1 = Exceptional

2 = Good

3 = Satisfactory

4 = Poor

5 = Very poor

Table 1.1 illustrates the results of the life management skills before and after tests were administered. While all respondents noted improvements in participants' life skills, the two groups reporting the greatest gains were students themselves and their parents. Although teachers noted improvements in quality of work and effort (both 16%), they noticed the greatest change in students' life management skills, which measured non-academic qualities like motivation, attitudes, problem solving and decision making, and goal setting.

Table 1.1 Life Management Skills Pre and Post Test Averages

Group	Pre-Test Average	Post-Test Average	Improvement Percentage
Participants (Students)	3.43	2.28	33%
Teachers	3.63	2.80	23%
Facilitators	3.55	2.65	25%
Parents	3.30	2.39	28%

Increases in motivation and confidence and improvements in attitude were frequently reported by facilitators, parents, and students. A common parental comment during the course as well as six months later was: 'His confidence in his own abilities seems to have improved and he appears to have matured throughout the course.' A facilitator echoed this view. 'It's clear that all the students are benefiting from the program. Those with low reading ability have gained confidence and are now willing to contribute to reading aloud ... Pupils have been asked to contribute their views for this report [and] seven feel that they have gained in confidence.' A facilitator of another group felt that 'they have more courage to speak up, and they can say things that they otherwise wouldn't be able to say.' Regarding one particular student, a facilitator said that 'he appears much more at ease with himself ... as the course progressed so did his confidence.' Another parent was pleased with her daughter's attitude: 'Her attitude to most things has improved.' Improved attitudes were also noted by one facilitator, who stated that: 'He changed over the weeks from having a definite anti-school attitude to a more open attitude where he is now willing to accept that there could be a different point of view.' Students also saw benefits from more positive attitudes: 'I think that my attitude has changed toward my teachers and they seem to like me a bit more.'

Six months after completing the program, students still felt more confident and positive:

'I have become more positive in my thinking'

'I am doing a lot better in math because I have changed my attitude'

'I have more confidence to work harder'

'I work on being positive every day'

'I go to class with a positive attitude'

'I feel better about myself and that I can achieve more things'

'I learned more self-confidence'

Facilitators noticed progress in the ability to set realistic goals. One stated: 'He showed determination to be successful in meeting more attainable targets that he set for himself.' Students also gained a greater respect for setting goals. One commented: 'The UK-I-Can course made me think about the future, about what I am going to do with my life. I now see school in a different way; I don't see it as a punishment, but as a way to help me boost up my life.' This was repeated by another participant, who said, 'Since UK-I-Can, I have started to think about my future and what I am going to do with my life.'

A positive change in students' interactions was noted by students, facilitators and teachers. Regarding one of his students, a facilitator said, 'Although he did not make significant advances in his subjects, he did make marked improvements in his relationships within the group and gained insight into the importance of the feelings of others.' Students themselves expressed success with peer and familial interactions. One said: 'At home I am more helpful and I talk to my dad more. I cleaned my bedroom and he was surprised. I now say 'please' and 'thank you' more.' One parent was also pleased with improvements in his child' empathy: 'Our son has gained more understanding of other people's feelings and can now understand reasoning. He thinks more about his actions. He gave both of us an insight into school life.' Facilitators too noticed improvements in interpersonal skills. One observed of a student: 'It was pleasing to see his growing self-control, self-awareness, and awareness of others' feelings ... towards the end of the course, he was much more able to express himself in a calm manner and to listen to alternative options.' Some students expressed improvements in listening skills and cooperation: 'I'm better at listening to people,' said one. And another: 'Before the UK-I-Can program I talked back but now I listen and cooperate in a good way.' The meaning and value of respect was a lesson that one boy commented on. 'I learned to treat people with more respect and I don't lose my temper as much as I used to.'

Of the five areas assessed in this report, students exhibited the greatest gains in life management skills. Parents, facilitators, teachers, and students themselves reported improvements in attitude, motivation, effort, goal-setting, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills. Again, one explanation for this involves motivational theory. For students to be intrinsically motivated – to attend school, to behave, to put forth effort – they must 'perceive themselves as being both competent and self-determining' (Spaulding, p. 10, 1992). Attending daily sessions of a course that encourages them to speak openly and offers them a place to work out problems, fears, and issues allows students a structured, predictable forum in which to practice new skills. The greater a student's sense of control and competence, the more likely s/he will be intrinsically motivated to repeat these new skills.

Conclusion

The data demonstrated overall gains in students' quality of work, effort, attendance, behavior and life management skills. The greatest improvement was noted in the latter, which included qualities like motivation and attitudes. Students themselves reported the greatest improvement in life management skills, which indicates a greater sense of confidence in their ability to manage better both academic and non-academic areas of their lives. It is clear that students' levels of intrinsic motivation to attend school, behave, work hard, and improve the quality of their lives increased as a result of participating in the UK-I-Can program. The most probable cause for gains in these areas is that the program offered students the *opportunity* to take control, which provided them ample time to practice their *ability* to do so. These two self-perceptions are central to motivational theory, (Spaulding, 1992), and offer a valid explanation for improvements in all areas of the students' lives.

The program component with the least improvement was that of behavior. Although the 29 students on average exhibited a decrease in misbehavior, individually some students actually misbehaved more. One explanation for this increase can be explained by the 'implementation dip,' and at-risk students who had already met with repeated failure would be especially likely to experience difficulty. However, it is still important to note that incidents of misbehavior decreased over the period of UK-I-Can's implementation.

It is also significant to note that the data results were consistent among all groups. Students' perceptions of personal improvement mirrored teachers', parents' and facilitators' perceptions. Demographic data such as attendance and incidents of misbehavior also

reflected improvements noted by teacher, parent, facilitator and student surveys.

What is clear is that this program shifts responsibility to an internal locus of control, where students see that they are responsible for their actions. It provides at-risk students with another level of support that can help them stay and be successful in school. More importantly, it provides them with necessary life skills to be successful in and out of the classroom. On a basis of sound motivational theory, the UK-I-Can program provides students with a safe, predictable environment to challenge old perceptions and practice new skills. Students are given the opportunity to take control of their decisions, and are challenged to a greater level of accountability. They are rewarded with encouragement, recognition, empathy, and respect. The methods and structure of the program ensure that all participants will be successful, even if just for attending. The combination of successful experiences, perceptions of control, and caring relationships provides students with a powerful system of support, and helps eradicate their disconnectedness from school.

The impact of the program can best be summed up by one of the participants: 'While the course was running, I felt more confident about my friendships. I liked the UK-I-Can period, and I would like to continue it all the time. I liked the facilitators because they were different than other teachers-not moody – and they were fair. They also listened and respected us and treated us as individuals. They handled us each as we needed to be handled rather than all the same. My facilitator is the best teacher I ever had.'

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Unaccompanied Refugee Minors; a challenging group to teach

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Introduction

Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URM), like all adolescents, have the right to be able to develop emotionally and cognitively to their fullest potential in host countries (Article 6, Convention of the Rights of the Child, 1991). URM make up a very special and vulnerable population of young people under the age of 18 who have been separated from their parents or primary caregivers for a wide range of reasons. In the Guidelines on Policies and Procedures in dealing with Unaccompanied Children Seeking Asylum (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1997), it is stated that 'notwithstanding any of the (reasons for not being accompanied), unaccompanied children have often had little or no choice in the decisions that have led to their predicament and vulnerability, irrespective of the immigration status, and they have special needs that must be met'(p. 1).

There are a few international studies that have addressed the mental well-being of this population. From these studies and others which have addressed the problems of both accompanied and unaccompanied minors, the conclusion can be drawn that URM experience high levels of emotional distress and are, per definition, a risk group for the development of psychological problems (Macksoud and Aber, 1996; Miller, 1996). The results of a large scale research project that was carried out between 2002-2004 in the Netherlands (*URM and the Dutch Mental Healthcare Services*) confirm previous findings and indicate that the mental health and the emotional development of URM as a specific adolescent population are at great risk. The main objectives of the study were (a) to validate psychological assessment instruments for the reliable assessment of the mental health of URM, (b) to establish the prevalence and nature of the psycho-social distress of URM, (c) to recognise their mental healthcare needs; and (d) to assess their psychological adaptation in the Netherlands.

Mental Health of Unaccompanied Refugee Minors in the Netherlands

The study was epidemiological and consisted of two assessment sessions (follow-up study) with an interval of twelve months. URM and their legal guardians (case workers) and teachers all participated in the study. The project took place throughout all the provinces of the Netherlands. Screening questionnaires were administered to URM (available in 19 different languages at http://www.centrum45.nl/research/amaenggz/ukamtool.php), their legal guardians, and teachers. A total of 920 Unaccompanied Refugee Minors took part in the first assessment in the period of 2002-2003, comprising ten per cent of the total URM population residing at that time in the Netherlands. During the second assessment in the period 2003-2004, 582 (63%) of the URM from the original 920 filled in the questionnaires for a second time. The guardians and teachers of URM also filled in questionnaires twice. Two-thirds of the sample had been living in the Netherlands for a period of 18 months or less. The male-female ratio was approximately 70-30%; the average age 16 years. Although young people from 50 different countries were represented in the study, Angola, China, Sierra Leone and Guinea were the most represented countries in the sample. Fifty-five percent of the URM sample had received education for five years or less.

The self-reported psychological distress of URM was severe in comparison with the adolescent population where there was at least one parental caregiver. This distress was of a chronic nature and was confirmed by reports from the legal guardians and teachers. Having experienced a great number of adverse life events and being of an older age proved to be salient (risk) factors for psychological distress and traumatic stress. Given that feeling safe and receiving 24 hour adult supervision has a protective effect on the mental health of minors, Dutch adolescents living with at least one parental caregiver reported significant less psychological distress and traumatic stress reactions than the URM, However, the Dutch young people did report significantly more problematic behaviour (such as delinquent behaviour and abuse of drugs) than URM.

Unsurprisingly, the levels of psychological distress and traumatic stress reactions during the first assessment period were predictive of the levels of psychological distress at the follow-up assessment reported by each informant. Agreement in reports between the multiple informants (URM, guardians, and teachers) was poor; however this result has also been found in other studies among adolescents in general. The disagreement between informants appears to imply that teachers and legal guardians are not always able to perceive the psychological distress and traumatic stress reactions that URM experience. However, the more time a teacher spent each week with a minor the better the teacher was able to accurately recognise the psychological distress the minors were experiencing.

Information concerning the mental health care needs and utilisation of services of URM was also collected during the study and compared with those of Dutch adolescents. The findings indicated that URM who report mental health care needs (58%) also report higher levels of emotional distress than Dutch adolescents who report a similar need for mental health care (8%). However, guardians and teachers detected emotional distress and mental health needs in only 30% of URM. Furthermore, approximately 40% of the teachers of URM had not informed the legal guardians of the emotional and/or behavioural problems of the URM which they had seen in their classrooms. The referral of URM to mental health care services does not appear to be driven by the reported needs of the URM, but by the need and emotional distress as observed and perceived by guardians. This resulted in the fact that 48.7% of the URM total sample reported that their need for mental health care was unmet.

Finally, in spite of overwhelming adversity and high levels of psychological distress, the majority of URM appeared to be adapting well to their situation in the Netherlands by working on age appropriate developmental tasks such as planning a future and receiving an education. Working on acquiring a trade or profession is essential in all cultures and is a key developmental task of adolescence. Following vocational training gives structure, creates stability, and gives URM the peace of mind that they will be able to provide for their and their families' material needs in the future. The URM which showed the least amount of interest in receiving an education also reported more externalised problem behaviour. It is possible that URM with an inclination to 'act out' their distress are not capable of making and completing long term goals because of a low tolerance for frustration. Special attention should be given to URM with externalising problem behaviour to help them receive appropriate guidance in acquiring skills that will enable them to structure their lives.

The most important wish expressed by many URM in the study was to work towards a secure future/ obtain a profession (trade). Half of the URM in this study were uncertain about the outcome of their futures for the coming ten years. Perhaps unsurprisingly, URM who wished for a normal life/ to feel emotionally better also reported higher levels of psychological distress. Many URM seem to have adapted under great emotional suffering: approximately 60% could be classified during the first or second assessment as possibly fulfilling the diagnostic criteria for a Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Effects of psychological distress and traumatic stress on the school performance of URM

Behavioural difficulties, anxiety and depressive symptoms are well known mental health problems in many industrial countries. However, traumatic stress reactions are not so well known. In effect, there are many symptoms that can be considered traumatic stress reactions – and can also be associated with other emotional disorders. Below is a short list of the most prominent:

- Persistent upsetting thoughts and memories of a traumatic event
- Flashbacks (images, sounds, smells, or feelings)
- Avoiding people, places and situations that are associated with a traumatic event
- Constant worrying
- Physical problems (e.g., headaches, stomach aches)
- Emotional numbness/detachment
- Nightmares
- Sleep problems
- Depression
- Being startled easily
- Loss of interest in things
- Irritability
- Aggressive behaviour
- Difficulty concentrating
- Acting younger than their age (regressive behaviour)

Adolescents who experience severe and long-lasting traumatic stress reactions, anxiety and depressive symptoms have been found to worry a lot and think very negatively about the future (Pynoos, Steinberg, and Picentini, 1999) as well as experience a general sense of hopelessness (Nolen-Hoeksema, Girgus, and Seligman 1986; Salmon and Bryant, 2002). All of these symptoms can inhibit clear thinking, which is very important in this developmental stage of their life. Difficulty focusing their attention and having problems with memory have been shown to translate into low academic achievement, poor school attendance, and dropping out of school among adolescents (Shakoor and Chalmers, 1991). Furthermore, a state of hyper-alertness, one of the possible symptoms of a Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, can interfere with the ability to concentrate, and in turn can impede the retention of (new) information. This could be very frustrating to young people who want to learn but are not able to retain the information they are studying. It is further plausible that URM are functioning at a different – lower – cognitive developmental level than their Western adolescent peers, due to the limited amount of formal education that they have received. Their way of thinking might also be distorted by their negative emotions and traumatic stress reactions.

Behavioural problems such as truancy, hyperactivity, delinquent behaviours and reckless sexual behaviour (Helzer *et al.* 1987; Wozink *et al.*, 1999) have also been found to be possible manifestations of traumatic stress. It is however not clear if the behavioural problems are a result of experiencing traumatic events or if young people with behavioural problems end up experiencing more adverse events because of their poor interactions with others and/or low impulse control. Nevertheless, special attention should be given to URM with behavioural problems to help them learn to stay on task, manage their impulses and anger, and enable them to set, and fulfill, long term goals.

Low threshold social-emotional interventions at school

(See the The National Association of School Psychologists website http://www.nasponline.org/NEAT/crisismain.html#trauma for many practical tips for educators on dealing with emotional distress and trauma in children and adolescents)

Professional mental health care is needed if URM exhibit: aggressive emotional outbursts; preoccupation with traumatic event(s); continued and excessive social withdrawal; and other signs of intense anxiety

or emotional difficulties. A qualified mental health professional can help minors to understand and deal with disturbing thoughts, feelings and behaviours.

The school setting can function as an informal environment that provides structure and safety, where low threshold mental health care services can be provided to refugee adolescents (Smith, Perrin, Yule, Hacom and Stuvland, 2002). In addition, schools may be helpful in identifying adolescents who are in need of professional mental health care. During the last few years, there has been an increase in the literature of school-based psycho-social interventions for refugee and immigrant youth (Atkins, 2005; Ingleby and Watters, 2002; Layne *et al.*, 2001; Hamiliton and Dennis, 2004; O'Shea, Hodes, Down, and Bramley, 2000; Neugebauer, 2003; Stein *et al.*, 2003; Rousseau , Drapeau, Lacroix, Bagilishya, and Heusch, 2005). Only a few studies have thoroughly examined the effect of interventions on the mental health of refugee children (e.g., Entholt, Smith, and Yule, 2005; Rousseau *et al.*, 2005; Stein *et al.*, 2003). Many of these interventions are based on cognitive-behavioural principles and share some basic components in promoting resilience among adolescents such as providing basic knowledge to adolescents on common reactions to stress or trauma and teaching basic emotional and social problem-solving skills.

Teachers can also help URM experiencing emotional distress and behavioural problems. Simply asking them about their experiences and their reactions (once a trusting relationship has been established) can have a beneficial effect. Instead of dismissing the emotional problems, the worries and anxieties and problematic behaviours of URM, it is important to talk to URM and listen attentively. This can be especially difficult and time-consuming since URM might not have fully acquired the language of the host country. Letting minors know that the teacher is concerned with their well-being is important in helping to promote their self-worth and attendance at school. Moreover, it is essential that URM learn to interpret their adverse experiences accurately. This is a crucial step in working through their painful experiences because misattributions and incorrect assumptions could be made about the events they have experienced. It can help to 'normalise' the reactions or symptoms that they are experiencing. By letting URM know that their thoughts and feelings are normal given their situation they come to understand that there is nothing 'crazy' or 'weird' about the reactions they experience. Moreover, they acquire an awareness that it is possible to learn how to manage the emotional pain which might feel overwhelming at times.

On the other hand, directly addressing the trauma is not always beneficial, especially for young people who do not already have positive ways of dealing with stress and anxiety. Insistent focus on talking about the trauma may even have adverse consequences if the adolescent is not mentally equipped to handle the information and the emotional upheaval that may be triggered by directly talking about the traumas. Before they begin to talk about their feelings and emotions, they must first learn positive and active ways to reduce anxiety. Relaxation and stress management techniques such as progressive muscle relaxation, deep breathing, thought stopping, positive imagery, etc. can help young people regain a sense of mastery over her or his thoughts and feelings. More indirect methods of interventions such as drawing or constructing projects, acting, creative writing of stories, poems, or songs can also provide URM with a way to express their feelings and may enable them to reflect on the emotions that they are experiencing.

Behaviour management training can be helpful too. It is important to provide normal limit-setting and guidance in spite of emotional problems among URM, who often exhibit difficulties staying on task and therefore need to be redirected or receive multiple shorter tasks instead of one long task. Educators of URM should consider that many will not have experienced formal education and therefore are not trained to pay attention and sit for long periods of time in a classroom. The minor will still go through developmental tasks just like non-traumatised adolescents, though possibly at a different pace. While their adverse experiences are important, they are not the only important aspect in the life of a young unaccompanied refugee. Educators will need to teach them to lengthen their attention span and make it clear that certain behaviour is not appropriate and is no longer helpful in the current situation in which they live.

Conclusion

Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URM) have the right to develop cognitively and emotionally just as all other adolescents. This specific population does appear to be at great risk of developing mental health problems which could impede or delay normal development and social functioning. Many URM have received limited formal education in their lives, which could affect

their ability to perform in schools in host countries. It is prudent that efforts are made to reduce and manage the levels of psychological distress among URM living in host countries and to fulfil their mental health care needs. The school may contribute to this developmental process by providing structure, safety, understanding and low threshold mental health care. In addition, the school could contribute to early detection of adverse developments to prevent further difficulties. By doing so, unaccompanied refugee minors will be able to learn, mature and grow into self-sustaining individuals who can actively participate in society.

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Desperately trying to get through: establishing contact in work with adolescent drop-outs

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And so he says:

'OK....I'll watch, I'm not afraid'.

The pupil may well expand, invading the whole of the eye, burning like a real fire; the boy does not take his eye off her. And when everything has become black, completely black, he discovers the thing that no one had yet discovered in the eye of the wolf: the pupil is alive. It is a she-wolf curled up with her cubs, she stares at the boy and snarls. She doesn't move but, beneath her shiny coat, you can feel that she is as tense as a hurricane. Her lips are retracted revealing her shining fangs. The tips of her paws quiver, she is about to jump forward. A thin young boy like him will make a tasty morsel.

'So you're really not afraid?'

It's true. The boy remains still. He doesn't lower his gaze. Time passes. Then, very slowly, Black Flame's muscles relax. She ends up mumbling between her fangs:

'All right, then, if you want, look as much as you like, but don't disturb me while I'm giving lessons to my cubs, OK?'

Daniel Pennac, *The Eye of the Wolf*

In Pennac's book, the meeting between the boy and the wolf can only occur after an initial period has been spent confronting each other and sizing each other up. Only at this point can observation take the place of keeping an eye out or feeling exposed or intruded upon by the gaze of the other.

The caged wolf has learned not to mind the presence of humans who watch him either with great curiosity or with disinterest, in an absent-minded way. However, the nature of the boy's gaze is different and disturbing. So too are his tenacity and insistence. And the wolf, who lost an eye in an attempt to avoid capture, feels the tension that comes from putting up with the fixed, determined stare of the boy when it is so maimed.

'The wolf' – writes Pennac – *'feels extremely uneasy. There is no way she will avert her gaze; carrying on her way is completely out of the question. Consequently her only eye goes increasingly crazy and soon, through the*

scar of the dead eye, there appears a tear. It is not pain, but rather impotence and anger. At this point the boy does something odd, something which calms the wolf and puts her at her ease. The boy closes one of his eyes. And there they are staring at each other, eye to eye, in the deserted and silent zoo.'

The work we are going to describe is an account of the attempt to re-establish an educational relationship with adolescent drop-outs, for whom school often represented a cage from which they either escaped or were expelled.

An experimental school scheme named the Chance Project has been operating in Naples for the past three years. The idea behind it is to create a school which recognises the irrepressible way in which these boys and girls establish relationships with each other, and with school as an institution in particular. The school is therefore adapted to cope with and contain the impact.

Therefore, even though Pennac's story of Africa the boy and Blue Wolf was read to these teenagers, this paper focuses on those moments when school seemed to turn into a zoo, when the students obstinately tried to be seen and provoke an impact upon someone else. And sometimes, at different rates and in different ways varying from case to case, something happened which made the teacher feel that he or she had managed to establish contact with the teenager[1].

The resolution and tenacity which, in Pennac's book, make the boy special – his being there, day after day, without giving in to the other's attempt to discourage him – form part of the armoury of the Chance teachers. Hyatt Williams writes (1983): '*It is precisely the length of time involved, a fundamental requirement for every relationship of containment, that the teenager puts to the test, threatening at every moment to break off the relationship*'. The capacity to tolerate a reasonable dose of psychic and, at times, physical suffering should be included in any basic set of qualities that teachers working with these young people need. Without this, no kind of approach towards these boys and girls would be possible. The concept of 'double deprivation', introduced by Gianna Williams, (1997) is clearly applicable to these teenagers; she uses the term to refer to children and adolescents for whom, in addition to deprivation caused by the inadequacies and violence of their primary environment, there is also a second form of deprivation, determined by the damage caused to their interior world resulting in the incapacity to make use of those resources which are available. In order to restrain the incredibly strong drive to repeat the experience of academic failure – both for the children and the teachers – a great deal of energy is spent and appropriate solutions have to be found to safeguard and support the reparative capacities of the individual teachers and the Project as a whole.

We will look briefly at the characteristics of the Chance Project in order to highlight the resources invested in it by various institutions.

The Chance Project

The project was set up in 1998 in Naples on the initiative of three teachers who had been involved for a long time in preventing the phenomenon of dropping out from school: Angela Villani, Marco Rossi-Doria and Cesare Moreno. It is designed to attract girls and boys who have dropped out without having fulfilled the minimum legal academic requirements and to encourage them to complete their studies. They are asked to attend for a year and the aim is that they should get their middle school certificate (the basic fundamental qualification in Italy.[2]

Three areas of the city were chosen with particularly high levels of school dropout, where the socio-economic and cultural environment is characterised by deprivation and also where organised crime is well-entrenched. Two of these areas lie on the outskirts of Naples while a third is located in the old centre. Thirty girls and boys aged from 13 to 16 were selected from each of these areas, based on a list of potentially suitable cases compiled by social services. The parents and the teenagers themselves are then contacted and asked to come to an interview carried out by several Chance teachers in the presence of a social worker[3]. During the interview, the Project is described and they are shown the educational contract which contains the rights and responsibilities that adherence to the project entails. The teenager and parents are asked to reflect upon the proposal for awhile. If they decide to accept, the young person will have a further interview with just the teachers.

These interviews are held on the premises of the three state schools that host the Chance initiative/modules. The project is a collaboration between three institutions[4]: the Comune di Napoli, the Provveditorato agli Studi, and the Università 'Federico II', and is financed with funds provided by the

Parliamentary Act 285, a national piece of legislation that makes considerable funds available for safeguarding children and adolescents. The Comune (the City Council) makes its contribution through funding and supplying social services staff; the *Provveditorato* by making teachers available, who are chosen from among the most highly motivated staff, all of whom have previous experience of working in areas at risk; and the University by guaranteeing ongoing training and expert advice to all the people working on the project.

Amalia and Simonetta have different roles within the project. Amalia is a teacher of the district module in the district of Barra-San Giovanni and is involved directly in the work with the students while Simonetta is a psychotherapist specialising in problems of childhood and adolescence and is in charge, together with her colleague Paolo Valerio, of planning and co-ordinating training programmes in the field of psychology.

The relationship that teachers have with the boys and girls in question reveals a contradiction that is widespread in schools. Teachers are required to possess many different skills in both psychological and relational fields, even though these disciplines have not formed a part of their own professional training. On the contrary, they are considered components of the basic attributes of every 'good' teacher or the fruit of experience acquired in the field. However, psychoanalysis and Bion in particular have taught us that certain prerequisites must exist before experience can be a source of learning.

The teachers and psychologists working on the project attend group meetings designed to discuss the dynamics of their relationships with these teenagers: their impact on the individual teachers, on the team and on teaching in general. These groups meet on a fortnightly basis in the individual modules and are conducted by a psychotherapist who is specialised in the problems of children and adolescents and is an expert in institutional work. The groups base their discussions on the observations made by individual teachers, following the methodology which is now firmly established in the Seminars of Work Discussion in the 'Tavistock Model' courses.

With respect to this analysis[5], the ideas we present here are aimed at deepening the understanding of the observed dynamics, making use of theoretical contributions derived from the clinical and applied sphere of psychoanalysis. Discussed below are three case studies taken from everyday practice within the Chance school. The stories of these young people will be introduced by Amalia, who has been their teacher and reference tutor. Simonetta will make a brief comment after each of the cases described.

Gennaro: when playing with fire is not really a game.

Gennaro came to the interview together with his mother, a tiny, self-effacing woman who spoke in a low voice and stared vacantly into the surrounding space. They had missed the first appointment with Chance that had been set up through social services and had come to the school for an interview with us. Gennaro is the fourth of five children. His bricklayer father left home several years previously, never sending any money to the family. When Gennaro was small, he often truanted when his father took him along to work with him. Gennaro really enjoyed this. I noticed that Gennaro smiled as his mother told me this but that generally, he lowers his eyes and looks serious when his mother speaks.

Gennaro was already working for a greengrocer, loading fruit and vegetables and delivering them to people's homes. One of his older sisters lived with the family, together with her new-born baby. At the moment his eldest brother was in Modena with their father because he (the brother) had had an operation on his hand as a result of a nasty accident. He had spread strong glue on his hands and a 'friend', for a joke, had lit a lighter: there was a sudden gust of wind and his hand caught fire.

I pointed out to them that in this case, their father had taken care of his child. Moving on to other topics, I did not manage to see in her cautious replies and her lowered eyes what the mother was conveying to me. I looked at Gennaro even less. If I had, I might have noticed other things. I attributed the profound sense of unease I was feeling to the fact that the mother had begun to put pressure on me to find her a job: she said she was ready to work as a cleaner with her daughter. The woman did not let up and continued to implore me while I accompanied them to the door.

I saw Gennaro a few steps behind us. He was just close enough to overhear our conversation and just far enough away to remain at a safe distance. He brushed the wall with his fingers as he walked. I could see the boy's irritation and embarrassment. In relating this

incident to the group, I realised the unease that the interview had caused me but I did not feel able to communicate it. It felt as though I could not put what I had seen into words.

In the first two months of the Chance school, Gennaro always came later than the others; he arrived looking tired and with downcast eyes, freshly washed and with a lit cigarette between his lips. 'I'm absolutely knackered!' he would shout at me, when he could be bothered to respond to my requests to come into the classroom[6].

He would wander around the corridors, come into the staff room, look into the classrooms and the laboratories. Sometimes he just inspected them with a stare. If he felt in a jokey mood, he would grasp something and run out with it: a small saw, a felt-tip pen and some keys were his booty in one incident. I said to him: 'Would you give it back please? Do you want to put it down now?' Were these the sort of things that Gennaro *wanted* us to say to him?

On other mornings, he would come into the classroom silent and gloomy and sit down in a corner to do some puzzles. He devoured all the puzzles that we managed to bring to school.

One morning he destroyed the wall of the boys' toilets during one of the very first incredibly violent outbursts of some of the boys. They stopped when they heard the noise. He laughed and his face was in a grimace.

I was to see that grimace on many other occasions during the first three months: when he ran his lighter along the wall, on the notices, along the light switches; when, almost touching someone, he waved the lighter in front of their face; when, while smoking, he exhaled the smoke all over person in front of him.

This boy upset me, irritated me, alarmed me.

In the middle of December, I tried to talk about him once more in the group. I gave a detailed account of an observation one morning when I saw him wandering through the large open spaces of a gym designed for wrestling, where we had accompanied the boys.

I saw Gennaro rush out quickly just as it was about to be his turn to have a go on the mat. 'I ain't gonna do it, miss,' he said.

My reassurances that he didn't have to if he didn't feel up to it were not enough.

'I gotta go to the toilet', he replied in irritation.

I could see him smoking, which broke the rules. I watched him walk away, look into other gyms, come back in, sit on the edge of the mat and with a lost look on his face once more.

I saw him go out again and meet the gaze of a group of disabled children.

The following is a brief extract from the observation:

> *'....His gaze changed. He came close and asked me: 'Are they stupid? Are they handicapped?'*
>
> *I explained and we looked each other in the eyes. Gennaro approached the teacher and asked her if they were her children.*
>
> *Gennaro had a brighter look in his eyes and he was following what was going on. His classmates arrived. He smiled. He joined them to play football.'*

After this observation, Gennaro seemed to me to be less distant and less alarming.

His game of 'cat and mouse' seemed less suffocating. I felt freer and a bit more aware of what he provoked in me. I was less on guard and felt that he too was easing up; perhaps he felt less hunted down. For Christmas, Gennaro made paper ball decorations with gilded thread. The next day he destroyed them: he kicked them to bits with other classmates.

With a colleague of mine, he painted two entire walls of a classroom. He remained for days at a time on his own, colouring the sky and the background. Then he completely lost interest and began causing us a lot of trouble with a hacksaw, hammer and nails. A photo of him hammering away, his head shaved, remains one of the most alarming in the whole of the Chance project.

Gennaro managed to construct a few simple sentences and on one occasion told me he wanted to write down some of his thoughts about his mother. He tried to organise them into some sort of sequence. In addition, every so often he would start studying some basic mathematics.

On the morning of the oral exams, I was struck by the certainty that he would not come to school: I had seen

him cursing when he learned that the exam would take place on a Saturday, a day when he had to work very hard at the greengrocer's. I sensed that the symbolic value of the exam weighed too heavily upon him. I also felt that the tension and the forthcoming separation from him were possibly causing me to feel stressed but I felt as though I were in danger.

I still cannot say – and two years have now gone by – whether I already knew the truth, or whether there were still a few days to go before I was to learn, that it had been Gennaro who had set light to his brother's hands and that he had been the person responsible for setting light to a puppy who had been given a place to stay in the church garden.

I went to an agreed meeting place to see him before the exams. His brother was also there and he was trying to stop Gennaro from getting into the car that would take him to school. He made continually deprecating remarks and in the end said 'you don't go to do an exam with your working clothes on'. I replied that Gennaro's clothes were an honour for him and for us. I recall the image of the brother's wrinkled hand and the small metal cone that covered his little finger. He insisted on trying to discourage Gennaro and in the end I lost my patience and my temper.

I've often thought that if, during that first interview, I had known how to explore the silent pain of his mother, she might have found the words to express it; that I might have managed to start to understand his life story, which would in turn have brought me closer to the boy from a much earlier point and in a more satisfactory way. I then realised that as time went on, none of us were ready for those fragments which are so terrible to tell and hard to take in.

After the summer, when school started again, we respected Gennaro's wish to dedicate himself exclusively to his job; it seemed to us out of the question that he should continue at school. His pain could find an outlet in his need to work.

In January I met him again: he had grown, he was well-dressed, his hair was longer and better kept and framed his face, which now had an expression of happiness and emotion. He asked me to come and see his new house where I met his sister and saw his new-born niece.

In the months that followed, he continued to send his regards via the school caretaker who lived in the same street as he did. He never returned to school.

Comment

Listening and looking are woven into Amalia's description of the first interview with Gennaro and his mother. In reality, it is the boy's mother who speaks. Gennaro lets his gaze, his expressions and gestures convey his silent communications: his eyes turned downwards; his smile as his mother recounts him accompanying the father to work; the embarrassment at hearing his family's problems exposed; the threshold of nearness-distance which he maintains; the gesture where he grazes the wall, as though he wants to sample the characteristics, the 'matter' of which this new place and the people who inhabit it are made.

Through the account of the distant father and the sister housed in the parents' house together with her daughter, we perceive stories of economic hardship and family ties that have been loosened or are already destroyed.

However, as well as speaking to us about Gennaro through what she hears and sees, Amalia also tells us something about the boy and his mother through the impossibility of watching, like the fall of a curtain, during the moment in which she learns of the brother's accident: a mixture of misfortune, irresponsibility, self-destructiveness and violence.

The individual's capacity to endure suffering has certain limits which, when exceeded, lead to the use of primitive means of defence which play a reparative function in order to avoid feeling overwhelmed and impotent. Not being able to see, 'turning a blind eye' (Steiner 1993) would for a long time prevent Amalia from realising the truth which is actually right under her eyes.

'Describe in your own words....': this is how the titles of essays often given to students of this age begin. And through repetitive actions, specifically through his 'playing' with the lighter, Gennaro recounts the accident of which he was the cause. Even the distorted laugh and the grimace, associated with his destructive gestures, reveal something about him: that his violence – leaving aside the question of the original causes that had provoked it – had assumed a sadistic quality and has become a source of pleasure.

Gennaro instils in the tutor feelings of alarm, rejection and the need for control. However, the observation she makes in the gym seems to create some internal space and helps Amalia to recover a certain degree of distance between herself and those obscure and forceful feelings. She 'captures' the boy's physical and psychic feelings which are so pregnant with symbolic meaning.

Even Gennaro seems to need to maintain a distance in order to be able to observe, in this case transposed to other students and another teacher, the very intimate and special 'maternal' relationship between him and his teachers.

In the following months signs appear in Gennaro of a greater internal mobility, such as when he makes the Christmas decorations. However, the attacker-attacked dynamic re-emerges at intrapsychic levels: indeed, he destroys his own creations, as though having to be attacked were now a part of him that can be trusted and anticipated, a dependent space in which to store his vulnerabilities.

From this point of view, the sudden departure from the classroom which he had so assiduously helped to paint can be interpreted as the need to protect his work – and the relationship with the teacher who has helped him in his work – from these destructive components which are viewed as hard to control.

The uncertainty and risk, linked to this precarious equilibrium, are transmitted and communicated to the tutor, who feels anxious and worried about the approaching exam and is also perturbed by the difficulty in choosing a dividing line between feelings which belong to her and feelings which echo the communications made by the boy. It is important that Amalia manages, in this case, to 'take on board the warning signs': Gennaro's previous attacks on his creations, the look of irritation on his face at the conflict between the exam and work and, in a previous situation, setting fire to the puppies – these signals may not have been adequately perceived.

The rush to the meeting place and Gennaro's attempt to defend himself from his brother's attempt to sabotage his intention seem to be the result of Amalia's prompt response to the boy's need to be protected. He still seems incapable of mounting an adequate defence of his objects and good parts from attacks by others and by a part of himself.

This inability to defend himself may originate from unconscious self-punitive needs, but also from the confusion, which is often present among these teenagers, between aggression and violence. In a recent article on work with 'adolescents who represent a challenge', Anne Horne (2001) observes that for them 'the use of aggression (proves) especially difficult. This emerges in an uncontrollable way during their lives, overwhelming others and themselves. They need to have practice in assertive aggression and justified anger...The construction of an emotional vocabulary and practice in the sphere of anger – the capacity to recognise power and aggression, to observe when they are appropriate and begin to use them – are essential'.

The 'construction of a vocabulary', 'exercises' and 'practice' – the ordinary instruments of the teacher – often assume, in the experience of the Chance teachers, this more primary meaning, since they are aimed at encouraging the capacity to identify, distinguish, denominate and express emotions which are confused, buried or merely potential. Clearly, we do not learn to what extent Gennaro will manage to defend his good and reparative parts from destructive components, without the external support offered by the teachers and the containment offered by the structure of the Chance Project. The short-term nature of the experience, restricted to one year, has raised serious doubts and considerable perplexity among the team about the possibility of interiorising and consolidating the changes activated within the boys and girls in such a short period of time. Fortunately, a recent modification of the law on the minimum school-leaving age, raising it by one year, has allowed us to offer some of the students a two-year course.

In Gennaro's case, this did not seem feasible, partly because of his job, which was very important to him for economic reasons but also because it appeared to be the expression of his good and responsible parts, which in turn derive from the identification with positive aspects of his father. However, Gennaro still seems to feel within the orbit of a supportive figure to whom he can show that he is continuing to grow: he is taller, his hair is longer and no longer shaven, but most important of all, he seems to nurture benevolent rather than ferociously destructive feelings towards what the tenderness, potential and fragility of childhood represents, both in reality and in a symbolic sense.

Rosetta: being able to scold someone

I sensed that I had reached Rosetta on that morning in mid-December when she hurled insults at me using the usual strong sexual expressions which dominate the slang of the teenagers on the Chance Project. Unaware of understatement or allusions, they use the same explicit language that they exchange among themselves in their exchanges with the teachers. The reference to oral sex is the most frequent. Thus it was that morning when Rosetta told me 'to suck off' but added, muttering, that I should go back 'to where you were yesterday when you didn't come to school.'

She was referring to the fact that I happened to have missed school the day before. She said this staring at me with her sea-blue eyes, with her body pressed against the wall almost as though she were trying to protect her chest which was beating hard. She had just finished 'rushing around' and was completely out of breath.

It was the first time, after two months of school, that she had managed to talk about herself and entrust the message of her pain to those harsh words: she had missed me and that was the only way she could find to express it – by rebuking me. This provided me with an opportunity to offer an explanation. In particular, she made herself accessible by expressing, albeit offensively, her attachment to me, her jealousy and the fact that she felt abandoned and betrayed.

What had made all this possible?

I think that Rosetta had felt that she could trust me because in me she had found someone who had never stopped watching her during those long months of school. They had been difficult months at school during which every day Rosetta, often several times in the same day, 'rushed around': she shouted, ran helter-skelter through the corridors, burst into classrooms where lessons were going on, muttered or shouted insults at anyone who happened to be in range.

'You're making a mistake, Rosetta, you're making a mistake!' These were the words that I said to her in the worst moments, looking her in the face and keeping perfectly still. They never provoked an outburst in her. She just looked at me. I think that Rosetta could see that I was not afraid to look her straight in the face.

Rosetta was the youngest of four children, with a mother who had lost her youth and had suddenly aged considerably, a father who was seemingly absent and distant, two married brothers who were in prison, a sister who was married, pregnant and already had three children.

Her incredibly violent behaviour spoke for her every day. When she managed to express herself in words, their banal obviousness would strike you and seemed to substantiate the events of her life; it seemed as though her past, her childhood, her family and school had evolved with a certain inevitability. In particular, Rosetta was ferociously determined not to think and not to remember.

It was she who made me reflect on the fact that the Chance project marked an occasion to work towards reconstructing an identity. The stories of these children brought us face to face with denied childhoods, derided needs and innate but hidden skills. All this was combined with the refusal to speak about themselves and the inability to look themselves in the face; it was Rosetta who first covered her face to hide herself when the screen showed her the pictures of the first days of the Chance Project which we had filmed. Her reminder that I had been absent the previous day was the first sign of recognition that something was missing and that she trusted me.

At the end of January, Rosetta accepted the news that she had been placed in the lowest level group without any visible reaction. However, she refused to work with the other two teachers in the class and continued to work exclusively with me, at least for the first two months.

She accepted the presence of two classmates within the group and managed to measure herself and disclose the massive lacunae in her knowledge. This would have been completely unthinkable in her first months at the school, when Rosetta had scarcely managed to cope, making use of her prodigious ability to copy work from others – something that she had perfected over the years.

Only after some time had passed did she accept the challenge of participating in workshop activities, which until then she had ignored or derided. The workshops 'hardly felt like being at school' and she found the idea of failure intolerable. Only when this fear diminished did Rosetta try painting on glass or making small gifts for her First Communion. At the exam she wrote captions for two of the photos in her album, undertaking the task and managing to write without help: something she had always refused to do.

Comment

It is necessary for a satisfying experience to be provided before a state of expectation is possible....The presence of expectations implies a satisfying experience, while the presence of requests indicates that these expectations have not been fulfilled, or that there has been an effective lack of real experiences. These words belong to Barbara Dockar-Drysdale (1990), a psychotherapist influenced by the work of Winnicott, who has worked for a long time with deprived adolescents in experimental schools and communities. In Rosetta's angry words, Amalia receives a request full of rebuke so that 'she justifies her absence', but it is a request that derives from the possibility of being able to have had, with her, the experience of a constant and reliable object. It is during the relationship with the teacher that Rosetta learns that reprimands exist, that they are a means of protesting, of asserting the fairness of her expectations and of chastising another person if she fails to meet them.

With Rosetta, Amalia and the other teachers realised for the first time the importance of doing work that would help all the teenagers rewrite their stories, cancelling, or at least correcting, the sense of inevitability with which they live and recount their existence. Rosetta and the other teenagers on the Chance Project seem to ignore the aspect of the hypothetical, the possible which dominates most adolescents.

Re-writing one's story is a possibility if one begins from current relationships and manages to avoid following a script which, at the age of 13 or 14, already seems to have been written. The boys and girls who are called to the initial interview with Chance are astonished that the teachers are not aware of 'who they are'; they almost mock them for what seems to them incomprehensible ignorance. They cannot imagine that a person is capable of seeing beyond the fact of belonging to a certain type of family or having gained a rather sad kind of reputation in the area.

However, it is not only at the moment of enrolling in the project that the possibility of rewriting one's own story has to be conveyed. This is merely one of the messages which continually needs to be reiterated and is constantly put to the test. This may even mean raising the stakes each time, just in order to be absolutely sure that one is not making a mistake and that they will not get hurt.

We have learned with experience that one of the most important requirements of a Chance worker is the capacity to absorb attacks. This capacity is not in itself masochistic, even though the boundaries are not easy to define since, as Horne observes, one is constantly facing up to, in work with these adolescents, a dynamic field defined by three vertices: 'victim-abuser-saviour' – and it is very easy to pass from one role to another.

In order 'to resist the implicit request of the young person to repeat the past' (Wilson, 1999), it is important that the worker does not let him/herself be 'used as a projection of the teenager's cruel, devaluing and humiliating super-ego' and 'deliberately assumes instead the characteristics of an inquisitive and supporting super-ego', capable of causing astonishment and 'offering the unexpected' (Horne, 2001).

This also takes place in the relationship with the parents, who often fail to respond to the teachers' requests for interviews because they expect to be reprimanded for the way they have brought up their children, as we will see in the next example.

Lucia: the risk of lowering one's guard

When, at the beginning of the academic year, we began to go on trips around the city, I tried asking those in the first group their opinions about why I had decided to take them to see the sea of Naples, a place that probably all of them already knew[7]. Lucia replied: 'To see how we behave'.

Her need to be controlled was incredibly strong. In the most difficult moments she muttered that we were not 'good', by which she meant that we were incompetent and not up to the task. She frequently called for severe punishments for those who broke the rules and mentioned several times that the school should have been locked up to stop children getting out 'without permission'.

Despite possessing excellent potential, Lucia found enormous difficulties trying to keep on task. She rarely came into the classroom of her own volition and often, when faced with the title of a composition, she waved her arms, shouting: 'how on earth am I going to start?'

And yet, after that first trip, she wrote two meaningful captions for the photos we had taken. In the first, she commented in an amusing and detailed way on each

of the subjects of the photographs while for the second, she wrote: 'I like being by myself and watching the sea'.

From the second trip onwards, she selected a classmate as her target and was merciless with him. Shortly afterwards, she lost her temper in an argument with some boys and there was a fight. The following day, when I tried to go over the episode with her and suggested that her reaction towards one of the boys had been excessive, she said: 'I'll make you feel the way I did when you've forgotten all about it'. What she meant to say was that she wanted to make me feel the same emotions that she had experienced, once I had forgotten the episode.

She kept her promise and provoked me considerably a little while later, as I was talking to two boys who had just had an argument. 'Did you see? I told you I'd make you mad like what I did!': she reminded me triumphantly. A few days later, she talked about her last holiday, boasting that she had terrorised a boy who didn't know how to swim. Then she went on to mention a memory she had. She had been at the seaside and had ended up underwater getting her feet caught in the holes of the rubber ring. She said she had drunk seawater and had been saved by her mother. Lucia had screamed at her: 'Didn't you see me?' She was four or five years old at the most.

It did not prove easy to put up with Lucia's provocations: she put me to the test in every possible way and sought a clash in every possible circumstance. We were frequently bewildered by her behaviour when she tried to undermine the cohesion of the group and sniggered when it seemed that I had different opinions from those of a colleague. She never missed an opportunity to taunt and exasperate the boys and was extremely unpopular with the girls. I believe that all this contributed to her failure to come to school for a while and I cannot deny that I feared I would lose her.

I continued to ask myself how I could 'reach' her. I pressed her mother with questions, facing a series of stumbling blocks in my attempts to make contact with her. Since I had no phone number for her parents, I clashed each time with Lucia who, though she visibly suffered the fact that her mother avoided all the official school appointments (pocket money, half-yearly report), gave curt and unanswerable justifications. 'Mum can't come!' – she shouted at me, giving me a furious stare. Lucia conveyed, to my eyes, the impenetrability of a world that lives (and thrives) on the borderline of legality.

When I managed to meet her mother, I observed how much she feared being criticised for having a daughter like Lucia. Her annoyance at having such an exuberant daughter soon emerged: she spoke of her as 'a tomboy', ungovernable, always fighting with her elder sister and little brother. She didn't hesitate to criticise Lucia for her appearance: 'She wants to go on a diet immediately after getting up from table' – she said with a sneer. I was extremely careful to describe, in a detailed and precise manner, Lucia's abilities and her technical and instrumental skills. I underlined her talent for pottery and artistic activities in general and her excellent organisational capacity.

I had to admit that Lucia could be overly 'exuberant' and downright rude and I noted that some of her inclinations could be considered bizarre but objected that, even though girls' football requires risk-taking, it should not be considered an activity for 'tomboys'. I felt it important to stress that Lucia was sensitive to the notion of transparency and coherence. 'Oh! That's absolutely true!' – her mother was forced to admit. Lucia did not stop listening to us for the whole time. Was she looking at me?

Towards the middle of the year, she wrote in an essay that she wanted to go for a trip around the city with the older children and take part in dancing lessons with them, in order to prepare a performance for the end of the year.

While we were organising both these initiatives, what I regard as the inevitable clash finally took place, something which had to happen before I could feel that I had reached her. She went out of school during lessons on board a scooter together with a classmate. I telephoned her grandmother's house, which was perfectly in line with the standard procedure and regulations we had set ourselves for the Chance project. When she returned to school, Lucia turned on me in fury, clearly fearing punishment from her parents. She was convinced this had been the aim of my phone call. When she was forced to face up to my reasoning, she threatened to kill me. I had no hesitation in shouting at her that I would report her: one more word and I would report her. I reminded her that we had always reported truancy to parents at Chance and that if she wanted, she could check with some of her classmates, amongst whom was a cousin of hers as well as other 'die-hards'....

Recently, however, events have taken place which have given cause for hope in the development that has begun in Lucia's character. The exhibition – the market containing the objects made by the children on the Chance project – gave her the chance to become better integrated with her group of classmates. She made the most of her organisational skills in working towards the exhibition and also created many of the objects that were sold. The exhibition also gave her the chance to face up to the real world and the reality of disappointment. It was extremely unfortunate that shortly before the exhibition, we were informed that it was forbidden to give out the takings to the children. Lucia went berserk and attacked the workshop rooms, 'going to work' on the walls with paints and paintbrushes....

However, the morning afterwards it took only a few seconds to reach a decision regarding the proposal put forward by several of my colleagues to use the money to buy toys for children in the paediatric oncology ward. Preparing the event had been a lengthy and laborious process, but it proved entirely successful, so much so that the head of the ward invited Lucia and the other teenagers to return, this time as teachers who would give lessons in making pottery to the children who were in hospital.

The reparative possibilities that seemed to be enacted in Lucia were underlined, in my view, by another episode which, although it might seem less vivid, is nevertheless just as significant. Seeing as we were close to the final exams, I took up another of the requests put forward by Lucia and agreed by the others. I suggested to them that they clean all the classrooms immaculately before their final exams. Lucia accepted my proposal, saying: 'Miss, we're gradually doing all the things that we said we wanted to do!' She left the room that had been entrusted to her sparklingly clean and was also able to help finish the work of her classmates. As we were finishing the cleaning, I was still cleaning the floor of one of the rooms with mops and a bucket. I felt I was being watched and then heard Lucia say, 'Leave it, miss- I'll finish off here!'.

At the exam, she asked for the Exam Commission's verdict on her Italian essay to be read out to her and she was applauded for her reading of a theatrical text.

Comment

Lucia has certainly overcome the difficulty of 'beginning the task' which consisted of 'cleaning' her external and internal world by getting on with the work of reparation that she has begun, even though we do not know how far she will be able to continue this in the future. This work brings into play in particular the qualities of her primitive super-ego, which performs the function of controlling and punishing rather than that of prevention and protection.

Her need for strict rules appears to be an attempt to create a strong barrier and deterrent against the destructive tendencies and behaviour which clearly belong to the family environment and 'culture' in which she has grown up, but which are also a natural attribute of her personality.

The strong sense of not being adequately seen and protected by her mother, which emerges in the account of her nearly drowning seems to have led her to create a personal 'life-jacket', a slightly safer system of defence. The state of impotence and terror is provoked in others – her friends, the children who cannot swim – while she reserves for herself the role of tormentor, a sadistic role which not only fails to help them but which provides her with a cruel form of pleasure.

The relationship with Amalia, her teacher and tutor, seems however to have offered her the possibility of finding a container rather than a 'receptacle' (Williams, G, 1997) for her destructive parts: in other words an object that is capable of surviving them. She has also been able, by means of this transformation, to make sure that they do not become intensified but rather that they are modulated, circumscribed and improved.

Lucia threatens, and also puts her tutor on her guard, when she tells her that she 'will make her see what it's like', meaning that she will make her experience the same feelings that she has had, and she will do this when Amalia has forgotten the event and will be less on the defensive and thus more exposed. Maybe it is the central anxiety, which is not only present in Lucia, but in most of the teenagers on the Chance Project: the fear of losing or at least of weakening, opening up cracks in their defensive armour and finding themselves vulnerable once more[a].

The fear of dying a second time and of feeling faced once again with nullifying anxieties at the precise

moment when they accept being psychically alive, capable of forming relationships, love, suffering and hope, helps explain much of the conflictual tone that these boys and girls bring to the relationship with their teachers. It is a fear that is submerged into the core of their beings.

Conclusions

We hope that despite their diversity, these stories reveal how important it has been for these teenagers to feel that there was someone to bear their clashes without succumbing or giving up the possibility of searching for a meaning.

We believe that Gennaro, Rosetta and Lucia realise that somewhere there has been and remains someone who has perceived life in their dark and furious eyes.

This is also a part of the meaning of the Chance Project: offering young lives already scarred the chance to discover themselves, reflected in the gaze of another person and invested with meaning and new hope.

Notes

1) We deliberately use the expression 'getting through to' (this being the translation of the Italian 'agganciare', meaning literally 'to hook', although in this case it is a reference to establishing temporary contact or engaging the enemy). The English expression refers (OED 1975) to 'reaching the attention or understanding of, becoming understood, making oneself clear, making contact by radio or telephone, arriving at,' while the adverb 'desperately' indicates the difficulty of getting through to someone who is often hard to get hold of.

2) The Project is designed to function alongside the traditional work of the social services in the field of school truancy, but from a reparative viewpoint rather than a punitive or repressive one. Indeed, it is worth stating that these teenagers are effectively considered school avoiders and this implies a legal responsibility for the parents with consequent intervention, in cases of repeated truancy from school, of the Italian Court for minors.

3) The project is organised from a practical point of view in slightly different ways in the three modules; the procedures described here are specifically related to the module used in Barra-San Giovanni.

4) In order to maintain a connection between so many different institutions, and to guarantee the best possible tension between the polarity of the norm and that of experimentation (the former tending to restrain and confirm the pre-existent status quo and the latter requiring continual adaptations to new needs as they emerge in the field), an assistance and monitoring group was set up for the Project. Its participants represent all the institutions involved and meet regularly on a fortnightly basis.

5) This discussion group is co-ordinated by Dr. Paola Giusti, to whom we give our warmest thanks.

6) Gennaro came to school 'dog-tired' and this is a characteristic that typifies many of the boys and girls on the Chance Project. Indeed, over the years, the teachers have also taken on the role of waking them up in the morning, telephoning them at home, sometimes even going to collect them and always providing breakfast for them at school. However, this somnolence has different causes. In the case of some pupils, such as Gennaro, it is the effect of having a job outside of school, while for others, it is an indication of neglect and brutalisation on the part of the family.

   A scene from a beautiful film by Bertrand Tavernier takes up the theme of parents who do not wake up their children to take them/send them to school. The film's title is 'Restarting from Today', and tells the autobiographical story of a school-teacher working in a French village which is hit by the closure of a mine and subsequent unemployment and a new poverty – as an old teacher says – which differs from that of the past, a poverty where the parents do not even speak any longer to their children. When the headmaster complains to a couple of parents about the irregular school attendance of their daughter, the mother replies that, as time goes on, they haven't even bothered to set the alarm. So they sleep because they haven't got anything to do in any case....

7) The situation of these teenagers is perfectly fitted to the title of Annamaria Ortese's novel (1994): 'Il mare non bagna Napoli'. (The sea does not reach Naples).

8) This state can perhaps be better understood by means of an example from the psychotherapeutic sphere. It is about a teenager who, when she was a small girl, had to cope with an early and prolonged separation from her mother. This she perceived as an incomprehensible rejection, from which she protected herself by constructing a complex system of defences where her needs as a child are denied and masked by an armour of self-sufficiency. During an advanced phase of the therapy, when she begins to face up to the encounter with her fragile and dependent parts, she has a recurrent dream. She has children in her arms but she does not know whether they are her children or not. In a subsequent dream, the figure of her father, whom she loved and had recently died, appears. Her father seems to have come back to life and complains with great suffering: 'Why do you want me to live again when I died so well the first time?'.

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An afternoon in the life of a telephone helpline adviser at the Advisory Centre for Education (ACE), London

Ingrid Sutherland,
Solicitor
Advisory Centre for Education

ACE is an independent national charity, whose trained advisers have been providing parents with support and legal advice for over 45 years. Parents ring the ACE advice line when they have a problem with their children's education. They call in with a broad spectrum of issues, ranging from what to do when their child has been excluded to how to find the best school for a child with learning difficulties. The following recounts my experience on the line one afternoon as a member of the ACE collective.

I donned my headphones at 2.00pm on a Wednesday in our rather noisy open plan office to answer a call, the first of many that afternoon. What follows is a selection of some of the calls.

A quietly spoken grandmother was on the line. Her grandson was living with her, subject to a court order. His mother was in a new relationship and was not able to care for him. His father was not on the scene. He had had quite a lot of disruption in his young life, being only nine years old, and was attending a state primary school near his grandmother's home.

Not surprisingly, he was exhibiting some behavioural problems at school and had been subject to a number of short exclusions (expulsions). He had been given a fixed period exclusion the previous week for general disruptive behaviour and on his return this week, there had been a serious incident during the final lesson the previous day. A hacksaw had been left lying around a classroom. An argument had started between some of the pupils and the caller's grandson had been mocked by a few classmates. She said that, according to the boy, a red mist had descended and at that moment he had grabbed hold of the hacksaw and started trying to saw a chair. A teacher had to remove it from him and he was sent home at the end of the day as usual. However, late that afternoon the grandmother was telephoned by the school and told that as he was a threat to the health and safety of others in the school and to himself, he could not return to school. The headteacher (principal) suggested that he should go to a local special school (for children with a legally binding statement of special educational needs, which specifies their needs and the provision they are entitled to).

In response to my questions, the grandmother said that the boy had not taken his SATs (Standardised Assessment Tests) last year as the school had just told her that he couldn't manage them. They said that he was being assessed [for special needs], but she knew nothing about any School Action, School Action Plus or Individual Education Plan work. These are the different stages to be gone through in a school setting if there is the possibility of a child having special educational needs. Initially, additional support is provided, monitored and reviewed by the class teacher. If, after this limited intervention, the child is still not achieving at the same level as his peers, then the school's special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) draws up an Individual Education Plan (IEP), which specifies the kind of additional help that will be given from the school's own resources and also drawing on possible outside support such as an educational psychologist's assessment, behaviour support intervention, etc. This should be decided in consultation with parents/carers and should state targets and the support (both human and other resources such as computer/reading programmes, depending on the needs of the individual child) to be made available with dates for progress to be monitored and reviewed).

The boy's grandmother said he was not given schoolwork when he was sent home. Providing schoolwork is actually a legal requirement of schools, in order to comply with human rights law not to deny a person a right to education whilst serving a period of exclusion. In addition, the grandmother had not received a formal exclusion letter: all the headteacher had said was that he had to stay at home until something was sorted out for him at a special school. There was no mention of her right to appeal.

I advised her of her rights, dividing these up between those relating to her grandson's possible special educational needs (SEN) and those relating to the indefinite/unlawful exclusion. In English law, an exclusion can only be for a fixed period up to 45 school days in a year or permanent. Indefinite or informal exclusions are illegal. I referred her to her local Parent Partnership Service. Local councils in England are required to set these up to provide a local face to face service for parents of children who may have special educational needs. This is in order to provide them with support and advice, such as attending meetings with schools and local authority officers and helping read and draft papers, to assist them in negotiating their way through the special needs system. I summarised her rights and responsibilities and urged her to contact the school immediately to ask for an urgent meeting to discuss what could be done. I sent her some of ACE's advice booklets, which give step-by-step guidance on how to get extra help from a school and how to appeal against an exclusion – although in this case, she had no exclusion to appeal against, given that it was informal and indefinite. I dictated a letter for her to send to the school confirming the legal situation and advised that her grandson had a right to go back to school, but that hopefully the school and her local authority would work together with her to put proper support in place for him, to avoid the risk of his being excluded again. If the school were to exclude him, at least she would then be able to appeal and the local authority would become involved, making him better placed than at present.

I was struck by this woman's insight into the situation. She prefaced all her remarks with an acknowledgement that it was a serious incident (although she was concerned that such a dangerous instrument was left lying around a primary school classroom) and she understood the school's difficulties. But she felt that she had no idea what her or her grandson's rights were: she didn't know what the school could or could not do and what she could do to sort out the situation. I explained that the school should have given her information about all this. She was also concerned that although the school knew about the family's legal situation, the headteacher had called her (the grandmother's) daughter and advised that her son should go and live with her. Her daughter had called the grandmother up to tell her this and had caused a lot of distress. I wished her luck and told her to ring back if she needed further help.

That all took about three quarters of an hour and the minute I put the telephone down, it rang again. This time it was a mother from the southwest of England whose 13 year old son had just been suspended for verbal abuse to staff. She said the school continually excluded him.

When he had returned from his latest exclusion, the boy had been put on report (whereby each teacher would have to write about his conduct in each lesson for a week) and had had a good week, with all teachers saying he had done really well. However, the day before the phone call, he had come home and said he had had an awful time at school. He had told his mother that an assistant headteacher had accused him

of being rude and had told him to go downstairs to be in isolation. She said he probably *had* been cheeky. As he got to the bottom of the stairs, another assistant head had shouted at him that he shouldn't be there and told him to go upstairs. He tried to explain that he had just been ordered downstairs but was told not to be rude and was sent back upstairs. On reaching the top of the stairs, the same thing happened with the first teacher. He eventually was taken to a room and just left to sit there.

He started playing with his planner (a personal diary for pupils to record homework, which usually contains useful school information). A teacher walked in and said he should give it to her. He refused as he said he had nothing to do and that he'd been left in the room alone for an hour. The teacher demanded he give it to her and he said 'oh, stick it up your bum then'. He was then sent home. The headteacher had telephoned her that night to say he was excluding her son for eight days.

She said she was worried that this had all happened because she had sought ACE's advice previously when her son had been excluded. Following our advice, she had written a letter to the school to ask for information about whether her son could possibly have special educational needs and asked about him possibly getting some behavioural support. She had had no response to this. Subsequently, when she spoke to the headteacher, she was told that her son just refused to accept discipline and had defied three senior members of staff. She told me that she too would have been frustrated if she had been treated the way he had. Although she acknowledged that schools had to maintain discipline, she said that pupils would only respect teachers if they felt they were being fairly treated and were listened to. The school, she concluded, was wrong to ignore her request for information and punish her son because she had asked for what she was entitled to have.

I advised her that she could pursue a formal complaint about this and also speak to the SEN section of her local authority and/or their parent partnership service and ask them to set up a meeting with the school to discuss how they could work together to support her son. I told her about the law and guidance concerning exclusions and how to go about trying to get her son back into school. In addition, I offered her further information about her right to appeal and how to prepare a statement, including getting her son to write down exactly what had happened, as the school had never got his version of events. She said she definitely wanted to continue trying to protect her son.

A few minutes later came the next call, this time from the northeast of England. This time it was from the mother of a seven year old boy, possibly on the autistic spectrum, who was not getting sufficient help from his school. I felt a kind of relief: at least he was not being excluded.

After the child had seen a consultant paediatrician, the mother had been told that her son was showing signs of autism. She had an older son who had been diagnosed with autism years ago. The younger boy had quite severe speech delay and was seeing a speech therapist, arranged through her doctor. He also had problems with comprehension. The school's special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) had told her he was behind his peer group but was making progress, albeit slowly, and that she did not think he had autism. He was given 10-15 minutes of support a day, but the mother felt he needed more than this. He had not done well in his key stage one SATs (taken at age seven). She wanted to apply for a special needs assessment, but the school had told her there were other children who needed help more than he did.

I advised her that she had the right to apply for an assessment herself, but that it would be better if the school supported her in this. I put her in touch with her local parent partnership service, recommending that she ask them to accompany her to a meeting with the school to discuss what support was appropriate for her son and how they were monitoring his progress.

Another call was again from a mother up north, whose secondary school-aged son was having problems. She had had an older son at the same school who had been disaffected and dropped out. She felt the school was typecasting her younger son as being in the same mould, as teachers kept referring to his older brother.

This boy was 14, with a reading age of nine. He misbehaved occasionally, but his mother felt that he was not always in the wrong and that sometimes he did this out of frustration or to cover up that fact that he could not do the work. He suffered from epilepsy but was not on medication, the result of which was that he was quite forgetful and at times appeared to blank out. The school had letters from his doctor explaining his condition. He had had some behaviour support in his primary school, but his current school offered him nothing.

Instead, he kept being sent home. Last week, a teacher told him he was not listening. She asked if he was deaf. He replied no and was sent home for being rude to a member of staff. The mother had been told that teachers were intimidated by his size, a strapping six foot.

This week he was sent home and the deputy head had said that she was not excluding him, just 'putting him on sick' until the end of term. She said that he would be better off going to another school and she knew of a school (further away from their home) which wanted to send one of their pupils to this school and they could arrange a swap. She told the mother that they would only be able to offer him part time attendance next term if he remained at his present school.

She rang the school to speak to the headteacher and was told that it had nothing to do with him and she should talk to his deputy. She had also now received two letters from the education welfare service (responsible for school truancy) asking why her son was off school on unauthorised absence.

I wasn't sure where to start with this tale of poor – never mind illegal – practice. I sent her one of our exclusion packs and information on how to get extra help from the school. I advised her that only the headteacher can exclude and it must be either for a fixed period or permanently and that she must be notified in writing of any exclusion, clearly stating the reasons for it. In no circumstances could the school force her to change school. I dictated a letter for her to send to the school and advised her to call back if she needed further help.

With a much needed cup of coffee in my hand, I took the next call. This was from a mother in the southeast, whose six-year old son had been diagnosed with leukaemia last year. As a result, he had had a lot of time off school with hospital appointments and illness. As a consequence, he had problems settling in to school, but once he got over this, he was fine. However, the school told her that he needed to attend a special school. She disagreed. They kept sending him home. As she had so much time off work looking after him since his illness, she was worried, especially as a single mother, that she was going to lose her job. She had meetings with the school every month, but felt that they were not taking on board the difficulties he had because of his illness. I again advised about her rights and responsibilities and told her about government guidance to schools on children with medical needs.

And that was it for the afternoon. Three hours of tales of woe and families battling a system that is supposed to be there to support them. Unusually, almost all the calls were about exclusions, although they also covered linked areas like special educational needs and sick children. An advice line will always get calls from people who are having problems. Through some of the training we deliver around the country to local authority and school personnel, we also hear about extremely good practice in schools. But in a way, this makes the bad practice worse. Schools can and do make a difference, but in this sample of calls, the difference was that they were making families' lives more difficult. It was also interesting that all the callers were prepared to admit that their children had problems and they were trying to work with the schools. They stated without hesitation that they knew their children were not the only children in their school, but they felt that as they were taking responsibility for their children, they needed some help from the schools too.

Sir Alan Steer, chair of the government's Leadership Group on Behaviour and Discipline, whose report came out last October, told *The Independent* newspaper on 13 October 2005: 'If you get a child who is misbehaving, you don't just say 'get out and don't come back.' The article goes on to say that he is a firm believer in the idea that respect for pupils pays off in the long run and that they will repay that respect as long as you ensure they have a good learning environment, quality teaching and a stimulating curriculum.

I can but agree with him and the parents with whom I spoke today.

[Some details have been changed to protect the anonymity of callers.]

For more information about ACE, see its website at www.ace-ed.org.uk

Its general advice line, open to UK callers only, is open Mon-Fri 2-5pm on 0207 704 3397.

A separate line for information on exclusion can be reached on 0207 704 9822.

Goal Attainment Scaling as an Effective Strategy to Assess the Outcomes of Mentoring Programs for Troubled Youth

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Mentoring programs are increasingly popular as preventive and/or supportive interventions for youth with various needs. As defined by the National Mentoring Partnership (2003), mentoring is *a structured and trusting relationship that brings young people together with caring individuals who offer guidance, support, and encouragement aimed at developing the competence and character of the mentee.* A meta-analysis of mentoring program effects conducted by DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, and Cooper (2002) suggests that youth from backgrounds of risk (defined broadly) have the capacity to benefit from mentoring, especially when best practices are employed and strong relationships are formed. Strong mentoring programs for special populations of youth may promote positive youth-mentor relationships and build a sense of trust in others. However, objective measures to assess the outcomes of mentoring relationships with youth are lacking in the literature (Nakkula and Harris, 2005). This paper describes an objective method to assess the outcomes of mentoring relationships with five special populations that are frequent participants in mentoring programs: abused and neglected youth, youth with disabilities, pregnant and parenting adolescents, juvenile offenders, and academically at-risk students.

Rhodes (2002) proposed a model in which mentor and protégé form an emotional bond. The mentor can then influence the protégé's developmental outcomes by: 1) enhancing social skills and emotional well-being; 2) improving cognitive skills through dialogue; and 3) serving as a role model and advocate. Although these are important outcomes of the mentoring relationship, these are psychological in nature and often hard to assess by mentors and mentees.

Outcome evaluations of mentoring programs often involve data collected from surveys, interviews, records or activity logs, including for example mentees' reports of their grades or behaviours, teachers reports on mentees' classroom behaviour, high school graduation rate, recidivism, etc. Rhodes (2002) suggests selecting outcomes that are logically related to the program, meaningful to the participants and persuasive to the program funders.

Kiresuk and Sherman (1968) first developed the Goal Attainment Scaling (GAS) concept as an objective tool for assessing the effectiveness of various mental health programs. It has since been used widely with appropriate internal consistency coefficients and inter-rater agreement reliability coefficients (Emerson and Neely, 1988; Garwick and Lampman, 1972) and has been adapted to evaluate the outcomes of several mentoring programs for troubled youth described here.

A key challenge to understanding whether and how mentoring programs work to improve the lives of special populations of youth is the persistent overlap of concurrent risk factors, populations and interventions. Blechman and Bopp (2005) note that as many as 12% of American youth below the age of 18 are at significant risk of adverse life outcomes (e.g., school failure and dropout, delinquency, substance abuse) due to a heavy load of challenges, such as abuse, neglect, poverty, chronic illnesses, cognitive and/or physical disabilities, and mental illnesses. Mentoring with most at-risk populations occurs in conjunction with other programs. Given the overlapping risks and protocols, in addition to methodological flaws of available research, it is difficult to evaluate 'what works' in current approaches to mentoring these populations. The following is a brief review of the relevant research.

Abused and neglected youth. In 2001, three million referrals were made to child protection agencies in the U.S. regarding the welfare of approximately five million children. Approximately 903,000 children were found to be victims of abuse or neglect; in 84% of the cases, perpetrators were the parent(s). On any given day, about 542,000 children are living in foster care in the U.S. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003). Mentoring relationships for many of these youth are assumed to provide a context for the revision of negative representations of self, parents, peers, teachers and school, thus preventing school maladjustment, failure and dropout. This assumption concerns the identification of cognitive and emotional variables associated with abuse and neglect, potentially linked to the impact of mentoring relationships on their future development. There have been a number of studies that have found that mentoring relationships (or, in some studies, perceived security in mentoring) lead to significant changes in a number of cognitive and emotional outcome variables, including attitudes toward school, academic confidence, self-concept, attitudes toward helping, feelings of school connectedness, representations of parental and teacher relationships, and perceptions of support from significant adults outside mentoring relationships (Larose and Tarabulsy, 2005).

Youth with disabilities. Prevalence rates for disabilities vary greatly depending on legal definitions and social constructions of impairment, disability, and handicap (McDonald, Balcazar, and Keys, 2005). The US Department of Education (2001) reported that youth receiving special education services in 2000 made up 11% of US students between the ages of 6 and 13. Youth with disabilities often grow up in settings that limit their social interactions and experiences, promote dependency and provide few opportunities to interact with 'normal' peers (Rousso and Wehmeyer, 2001). According to McDonald, Balcazar and Keys (2005), there are two key mentor characteristics in this area of research that may have an impact on the program goals and outcomes: whether the mentor has a disability and whether the mentor is a peer or an adult. The studies reviewed by MacDonald *et al* (2005) employed a variety of methodological approaches and mentoring combinations to help youth with various types of disabilities overcome obstacles, improve skills or develop new competencies. Their review provided preliminary evidence of the benefits of mentoring for youth with disabilities. At the same time, the authors cautioned that the mentoring experience is only one component of the very complex picture of youth with disabilities.

Juvenile offenders. In 2001, law enforcement agencies in the US made an estimated 2.3 million arrests of under 18s: juveniles accounted for approximately 17% of all arrests and 15% of all violent crime arrests (Snyder, 2003). Mentors are rarely integrated into the multi-disciplinary teams of professionals set up to support them. There is an evident need for better coordination of juvenile offenders' long-term care.

Academically at-risk students. Academically at-risk students are youth who have experienced failure or poor grades throughout their academic history. Recent longitudinal national data suggest that more than 12% of young Canadians (Bowlby and McMullen, 2002) and 15% of young Americans (Kaufman, Alt, and Chapman, 2001) will never graduate from high school. This proportion of students without diplomas is usually higher for boys than for girls.

Mentoring relationships allow at-risk students to change inappropriate behaviours and learn new behaviour strategies, thus reinforcing among students the development of social values and norms from the school's perspective. This assumption focuses on identifying the behavioural mechanisms involved in explaining the effects of mentoring relationships. Several studies indicate that mentoring relationships may have a significant impact on the school behaviours of academically at-risk students. Using quasi-experimental or experimental designs, participation in mentoring relationships is shown to be linked to higher attendance in class (but not sufficient to neutralise academic risk), fewer voluntary absences from school, lower aggressiveness, greater levels of social competence, more vocational skills, enhanced participation in college preparatory activities and higher probability of taking part in higher education (see Larose and Tarabulsy, 2005).

Although these studies point to the potentially beneficial effects of mentoring relationships, there is a need for a consistent and systematic approach to assessing the outcomes of mentoring relationships. This paper presents the results of a pilot evaluation of Goal Attainment Scaling (GAS) conducted with five mentoring programs serving youth offenders, youth with disabilities, at-risk college students, and underachieving youth. We also evaluated the mentors' perceptions of the benefits and/or challenges of using goal attainment scaling and engaging in goal-driven mentoring relationships.

Method

Participants

Birmingham Mentoring Consortium (BMC – 47 pairs)

Care Included (CI – 21 pairs)

Pioneers [Undergraduates] (PU – 51 pairs)

Pioneers [Volunteers] (PV – 28 pairs)

Birmingham Youth Offending Service (BYOS – 13 pairs)

The Care Included programme (CI) recruits volunteer mentors between the ages of 20-60, from white and black backgrounds. It has been in operation since September 2000, providing one on one mentoring with looked after children and young people at risk of exclusion.

The Pioneers Undergraduate Programme (PioU) recruits Pakistani and Bangladeshi undergraduates and the Pioneers Voluntary Programme (PioV) recruits people between 18-60 years old from the same backgrounds. They work with youth at risk of exclusion/explusion.

The Birmingham Youth Offending Service has been in operation since 1st April 2000, providing one on one mentoring for juvenile offenders.

Birmingham Mentoring Consortium (BMC) has been in operation since 1996. It provides same-race and cross-race mentoring with disadvantaged or under-achieving youth. Mentors are undergraduate students who receive a bursary to assist them with paying for their studies.

Gender distribution

(F/M%)	BMC	CI	PU	PV	BYOS
Mentor	48/52	77/23	44/56	58/42	50/50
Mentee	65/35	23/77	29/71	55/45	52/48

Average Age:

CI: mentors – 32 yrs
Mentees – 12 years
PU: mentors – 19 years
PU mentees – 13 years

The mentors and mentees for the other programmes will have a similar average age to the Care Included and Pioneers programmes.

Dependent Variables

Goal Attainment. A modified version of the Goal Attainment Scale (GAS, Kiresuk and Sherman, 1968) was used to assess participants' progress in reaching their goals. The GAS, which rates goal attainment on a scale from 1 to 5, has been used widely in evaluations of clinical treatment outcomes (e.g., Hogue, 1994), with good concurrent validity and inter-rater reliability (Emmerson and Neely, 1988; Garwick, 1974; Kiresuk, Smith, and Cardillo, 1994). For the purposes of this study, the scale was modified to account for progress towards the goal. The resulting scale had the following categories: (1) deterioration; (2) goal dropped, no intent to pursue it; (3) goal on hold, with future intent to pursue it; (4) active pursuit of goal, little or no progress; (5) active pursuit of goal, some progress; (6) accomplish less than desired goal, action may continue; (7) goal attained as expected, no further

actions; and (8) accomplished more than expected success.

In order to obtain a goal score for each mentee that could be compared across participants (given differences in types of goals and individual differences in experience, level of functioning, and motivation), the goal attainment scores were weighted using a formula.[1] The weights were developed on the basis of 30 experienced service providers who rated the relative importance of three factors: the degree of difficulty of each goal, the subjective importance of the goal to the consumers and the individual level of functioning (see Balcazar, Keys, Davis, Lardon, and Jones, 2005). The degree of difficulty of each goal was rated by a group of experts on a 3-point scale (relatively easy = 1 point; moderately difficult = 2 points; difficult = 3 points). The goals were sorted into these categories independently of the individuals who set them. The level of importance of each goal was self-determined by the participants also using a 3-point scale (relatively unimportant = 1 point; moderately important = 2 points; and very important = 3 points). Finally, the mentors assigned participants to two levels of functioning (high functioning = 1 point; and low functioning = 2 points).

Procedures

Representatives from the participating mentoring programs attended training sessions and meetings in which the GAS procedure was introduced. Mentor-mentee dyads were instructed to set at least one 'SMART' goal (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-related) to help mentors and mentees identify targets that could be easily recognised and attained in a relative short period of time. In each of the participating programs, a training session with mentors was held to explain the process of goal-driven mentoring and the GAS assessment. Each goal was rated on the dimensions of importance and personal competency by both mentor and mentee; difficulty for each goal was rated by the group of mentors at each organisation. Goal progress was rated twice at two 2-month intervals after baseline, except for the Birmingham Youth Offending Service, which conducted only one assessment.

Mentors were asked to prepare and collect the goal attainment scores at set times and to answer a series of open-ended questions about the process when the second round of goal attainment scores were collected. The qualitative data was later transcribed and summarized by staff from the coordinating organisation (Second City-Second Chance).

Results

The data was analysed using Paired-Samples T-tests. A summary of the results can be found in Table 1 (see Table 1). The average GAS score increase from baseline to the first assessment across all sites was $t = 14.503$, $df = 159$, $p < 0.0005$; and the average increase from baseline to the second assessment was $t = 21.099$, $df = 162$, $p < 0.0005$. In addition, the average increment in GAS scores from the first to the second assessment was $t = 10.120$, $df = 146$, $p < 0.0005$.

Table 1.
Summary of T-test scores for the five sites

Birmingham Mentoring Consortium	**t(two-tail)**	**df**	**p =**
Baseline to Time 1	6.837	46	.0005
Baseline to Time 2	8.584	46	.0005
Time 1 to Time 2	3.115	46	.003
Care Included	**t(two-tail)**	**df**	**p =**
Baseline to Time 1	2.7005	20	.0014
Baseline to Time 2	3.838	20	.0001
Time 1 to Time 2	3.200	20	.004

Pioneers t Undergraduate Program	**(two-tail)**	**df**	**p =**
Baseline to Time 1	12.632	50	.0005
Baseline to Time 2	19.747	50	.0005
Time 1 to Time 2	14.839	50	.0005
Pioneers t Voluntary Program	**(two-tail)**	**df**	**p =**
Baseline to Time 1	6.013	27	.0005
Baseline to Time 2	11.334	27	.0005
Time 1 to Time 2	5.592	27	.0005
Birmingham Youth Offending Service	**t(two-tail)**	**df**	**p =**
Baseline to Time 1	5.156	12	.0005

Types of Goals set by Mentors

To improve numeracy skills and understand techniques in algebra

To attend school and complete all activities (2 weeks)

Improve concentration skills by ensuring he contributes towards the project

Attend School 80% instead of 65% of the time

By March when on verge of a fight, mentee will stay calm, walk away and tell a teacher

Improve behaviour in science, need to be quieter, obedient and attentive

Achieve Grade C up from Grade D by March (in English)

Not to be late for school or lessons 90% of the time up from 70% by May

To cut back the number of times late to school to a maximum of 2 days

To complete two pieces of coursework by mid March

The following is a summary of the statements made by mentors, intended to evaluate their opinions about the GAS process in their mentoring relationship.

1. What is your opinion of goal setting as a Mentoring exercise?

Responses to this question were based largely around the idea that goal setting gave direction, focus and a framework to the mentoring relationship. Reference was also made to the sense of achievement and progress as beneficial to both mentee and mentor and a source of motivation and challenge. Many mentors regarded it as a vital and integral part of the relationship, helping to clarify strengths and weaknesses, identify issues, and build both the mentor and the mentee's skills. The quantifiable nature of the results was seen as positive, and it was suggested that the process allows the breakdown and assessment of issues to produce realistic and achievable goals with

gradual but long-lasting results. A further advantage identified by one mentor was that he found it broke down communication barriers and allowed the mentee to admit their strengths and weaknesses themselves. One mentor suggested age might be an important factor, and that their mentee may have been too young. One of the 'Care Included' mentors suggested that the relationship may be 'too delicate' for this type of exercise and that it may have to be 'disguised'. This was an issue raised by four of the 'Care Included' mentors, who chose not to participate for this reason.

2. What is your opinion of goal setting and rating as a possible evaluation of a mentoring relationship?

The results show both positive and negative feeling towards goal setting as a possible evaluation of mentoring. The positive aspects related to producing solid evidence of progress within the relationship for both the mentee and the mentor, and also for people outside the schemes. It was suggested as a useful overview of the progress made, with one mentor believing it is one of the only ways to monitor progress, and could be used as an 'official measurement' to monitor progress. One mentor pointed out that inadequacy or excesses within the relationship could be identified and another indicated that the process could reveal how well the mentor knows their mentee in terms of their capability and issues/areas for improvement. Mentors found that the practical components were organised and took little time, though the overall time scale allowed for the pilot study was highlighted as a problem: many mentors felt that not enough time was given. Other negative points included the view that goal setting was inappropriate for behavioural problems as it may be too much to continuously challenge the mentees with goals. It was also suggested that the amount of paperwork might make it difficult for the mentee to see the purpose of the goal setting. One mentor felt that goal setting on paper was not practical as it is difficult to put into practice. With specific reference to this process as an evaluation method, one mentor suggested it would have been better to have a control group for comparison. It was also highlighted that this method could not be used for evaluating the whole mentor/mentee relationship. One mentor suggested that if a goal is not achieved it should not be the only indicator of a relationship and that achievement of goals should be seen as an additional 'plus' to the mentoring relationship. Another said that it may not be an adequate evaluation of the relationship if, for instance, the relationship itself was excellent, but the mentee had little interest in achieving the specific goals. Mentee's stress was also highlighted as a factor that may affect the success of GAS as an evaluation.

3. How did you find rating your goals for 'importance,' 'difficulty,' and 'competency'?

Responses to this question were again mixed. Many mentors found these ratings as self explanatory and fairly easy with no problems. However, some mentors found them difficult to gauge for various reasons and suggested further training on ratings. Some mentors found 'difficulty' hard to rate: what is difficult for one mentee may be easy for another. Similarly, one mentor pointed out that this rating system does not account for mentees' differences in age, background, ethnicity etc, and that individual differences are hard to standardise. It was suggested that this was best undertaken with the mentee's input, with one mentor highlighting the difficulty faced if the goal was important to the mentee and mentor in different ways.

Another mentor whose mentee had special educational needs found rating the goals difficult as her mentee had little input and the mentor did not feel able to rate his competency adequately. Another expressed confusion between competency and difficulty, and yet another said that these scores could change over time as the mentee develops in competency. Further points raised included: difficulty rating if the mentor didn't know if the goals were long or short term; that the better the mentor knows the mentee the easier this process would be; that the GAS score sheet was too complex for the mentee; and that a motivation technique could be used to rate goal difficulty.

4. How did you find rating your goals for outcome?

Mentors found this rating both easy and difficult. Many responded to this question positively, saying that the range of definitions (from 1 to 8) made it easy, with one mentor suggesting this was easier than the other ratings, and many saying they were confident that they had rated their outcomes accurately. Ratings 1 and 2 were highlighted as useful, as were the 'in-between' ratings. The reasons given by the mentors who responded to this question negatively included: there was not enough time to properly rate the outcomes; it was difficult as progress is ongoing even after the relationship ends, therefore you could not get a true end-outcome; you could never be too sure of

the outcome, thus she rated her score fairly optimistically. Two mentors failed to reach a stage at which they felt they could give outcomes, one due to too many 'stop-starts' in mentee's efforts, and the other as the relationship broke down first (this was latter rated by the program coordinator as 1 – deterioration in the 1 to 8 scale). One Youth Offending Service mentor suggested his experience of this rating was 'haphazard' due to the mentee's history of bad behaviour.

5. What were the positive aspects of the goal setting and rating process?

The positive aspects highlighted by responses to this question were centred on the process providing a structure for the meetings and a focus for real goals. Mentors spoke of its benefits and visible results in terms of the mentees' greater self esteem, confidence, pride, achievement, communication, understanding and commitment. One mentor rated the rapid change in their mentee's behaviour as 'astonishing'. Other positives were that it allowed the organisation to show other people that the scheme was working; that it is quantifiable; that it enables the mentor to assess if they are setting goals to the right level; and that it heightens consideration of 'SMART' phrasing. It was also suggested that the goal setting was a learning process and that knowing how the mentor rated the goals gave the mentee confidence. It also allowed for early identification of unsuitable goals. One mentor suggested that there was plenty of time to try different approaches to achieving the goals.

6. What were the negative aspects of the goal setting and rating process?

Few mentors responded with no negatives. A large proportion referred to the amount of time available to rate the goals. There were a few negatives regarding its effect on the relationship and the mentees: it could frighten off some mentees; make the mentee feel uncomfortable; the overemphasis on goals was detrimental and added pressure to the relationship; labelling; lack of mentees' effort/they became bored with the process; the goals were too personal and the mentee did not wan to record them. Some mentees, it was suggested, may feel that the goals set are the only areas requiring improvement in their lives. One mentor thought this could inhibit the mentee if he/she does not like the goal activity. There were also negatives around choosing issues as a priority and setting appropriate goals and ratings, with one mentor responding that he was unable to set goals with his mentee as the 'whole setup (was) wrong'. Others said they didn't see the mentee regularly enough, their venues were formal, it required too much paperwork, there was a problem that smaller weekly goals that were set were not being recorded, and the feeling of failure if the goals are not achieved. One mentor also suggested that others may feel responsible for their mentee's progress. It was recommended that mentors get a second opinion to see if the goals set are in the best interests of the mentee.

7. Were there any practical problems?

A large proportion of mentors found no practical problems with the process. One mentor indicated that it was part of their normal mentoring practice, and another suggested it gave no extra heavy workload, so was therefore not a problem. The problems that did occur were associated with the timetable, with mentees not releasable at certain times of the day, absenteeism, interruptions and other people aggravating the mentee, travelling and other commitments, little interest, and the deterioration of one relationship. Another mentor said that progress is not entirely under the mentees' control and is affected by, for example, their parents. It was suggested that the mentor may not always remember what the goal is and may do activities based on a current problem rather than the goal.

8. Did your Mentee view it as a positive or negative exercise?

All the mentors apart from three responded that their mentees viewed the process as a positive activity, with another stating their mentee was indifferent at first but came to view it positively. Reasons for the positive outlook were: it showed achievement; gave long-run benefit; encouraged independent learning; gave a release from normal conversation. One mentor commented that it was appreciated by their older mentee, with others pointing out its benefits in terms of making the meetings more efficient and focused. Another stated that her mentee felt some satisfaction that her goal information would help others. Two mentors responded negatively and another answered that it was ambiguous, in that the session was viewed positively by the mentee as it got them out of lessons, but negatively as they knew they would be questioned about their goals and their progress.

9. Did the goal setting have an effect on your relationship with your mentee? If so, what was it?

Several mentors responded 'no' to this question. One stated it was part of their normal relationship so had no added effect. From the other responses, there were both positive and negative effects of goal setting on the various relationships. The more positive effects were that relationships were strengthened via working together to overcome problems in a calculated or observable way and there evolved a mutual feeling of achievement. Other positives were improvements in confidence, communication and understanding, contentment and self-assurance when achieving goals and a more professional relationship. One mentor suggested they had become closer as friends as a result, while another said it had had a major impact as their sessions were now more structured and it gave the opportunity to celebrate small and big successes. Another said it had helped their mentee realise that having a mentor was important. The negative impacts were around the fact that mentees did not like to hear when they were not achieving their goal. One mentee was said to be distant and didn't want to commit to a goal for fear of failure. Another felt it was a waste of time to keep going over goals, whereas one Youth Offending Service mentor realised her mentee was perhaps too young for a mentoring relationship with her, since the mentee did not have the 'realisation skills' required. It was also suggested that if the mentee found the goal hard or frustrating, it could place a strain on the relationship

10. Do you use methods other than goal setting that could be part of the evaluation?

Several mentors responded 'no' to this question. The other methods suggested were the use of case studies, personal notes, log books, observation, games, self appraisal and action planning, attendance reports, interviewing and 'probing', the use of scenarios and examples and exercises. One mentor uses a revision of the week before and questions to assess mentee progress. Several mentors also suggested the use of other agency feedback, such as teachers and tutors.

11. Do you have any suggestions for improvements/adaptations?

Two main suggestions came out of the responses to this question. The first was regarding the time frame, with many mentors suggesting that it should start at the beginning of the relationship in Sept/Oct and end in June/July. The second was for more training on goal setting, such as ideas for types of goal, different types of goals for different types of mentees, and more scale-rating training. Other ideas included the process needing to listen to the student more, that it should take into account age categories, that more organisations should be involved and that additional training in spotting improvements in the mentee is needed. Two mentors responded that there were no improvements to be made and that the process was well explained and easy to understand and clearly and concisely covered. It was suggested that the mentee be issued with a general questionnaire covering interests, ambitions etc. at the beginning of the mentoring relationship and that the teacher should also be issued with a questionnaire highlighting issues and areas of concern so that improvements can be seen at the end. One mentor responded that they do not wish to do it again.

12. Reasons for non – participation

There were three returned responses for non-participation: One felt it was not an appropriate evaluation, that they were unable to participate and gave personal family reasons; another said the Second City Second Chance programme was not an appropriate setting for this evaluation; and the last one was unavailable to participate in training due to being away on training dates. Finally, several of the Care Included mentors declined to participate due to the nature of their mentoring relationships. Dealing with emotionally disturbed youth, they deemed their relationships too delicate for this type of exercise due to the nature of the issues they were dealing with. One Care Included mentor provided a case study to illustrate the sensitivity of these relationships to justify the non-participation of some of the Care Included mentors.

Discussion

The analysis of the pilot GAS data showed significant scores for every comparison made and significant differences in each comparison, both within individual programmes and for the data as a whole. Therefore, the pilot data confirms that this method of evaluation could be used to demonstrate significant quantitative results, showing the effect of mentoring relationships on the achievement of mentees' goals. We recommend that this evaluation approach be used in future studies – including control groups not receiving mentoring support – to further determine the benefits of mentoring relationships among participating youth.

The process of mentors and mentees working together toward a particular goal has not been studied in previous research in part because of the lack of an assessment procedure such as the one presented here. The GAS not only allows for the evaluation of goal attainment but provides a new contextual framework for the mentoring relationship. It changes the traditional roles of the mentor and the mentee by increasing the expectation of actions on behalf of the mentee. It forces the mentee to take charge of pursuing a particular goal, the attainment of which is ultimately his/her responsibility. The mentor becomes a facilitator, an advisor, a guide and a source of praise when progress is made, or a source of constructive criticism when needed. He or she provides ongoing support but this support is no longer the main purpose of the relationship. The relationship is now being guided by the mentees' goals and their efforts to attain them.

As DuBois, Holloway, *et al.*, (2002) pointed out, merely taking part in a mentoring relationship provides adolescents with few objective benefits in terms of outcomes such as improved academic achievement or reduced use of drugs or alcohol. Darling (2005) indicated that although several authors have argued that emotional support and perceived closeness may be at the core of effective mentoring (e.g., Rhodes, 2002), outcome reviews of naturally occurring relationships like those with teachers and adolescents have been relatively weak. This is because researchers tend to focus primarily on the emotional quality of the relationships rather than on their instrumental qualities (Darling, Hamilton and Niego, 1994). The relative importance of affective versus instrumental qualities may depend on how mentoring is conceived. We have presented here an approach to assessing goal-driven mentoring relationships. This kind of mentoring is different from traditional mentoring relationships focusing primarily on providing emotional support to the mentee. Darling (2005) pointed out that to date, there is little research available that would allow us to differentiate the relative impact of these two models. One of Darling's recommendations is to study what mentors and mentees do, not just what they feel.

Some of the positive comments made by mentors during the qualitative evaluation of the pilot included their view that the GAS process was beneficial for both mentees and mentors: it became a vital part of the relationship, helping clarify strengths and weaknesses; identify issues and build skills; allowed for the breakdown and assessment of issues to produce realistic and achievable goals with gradual but long-lasting results; provided solid visible evidence of progress within the relationship for both the mentee and mentor; helped the mentor knows the mentee better and their capacity and needs for improvement. They also found that the rating of the GAS (1 to 8) was easy to do.

The process gave structure to the meetings and a focus or plan for action for real goal pursuit. It was positive to have visible results in terms of mentee's self-esteem, confidence, pride, achievement, communication, understanding and commitment to the mentoring relationship. One mentor rated the rapid positive changes in his mentee as 'astonishing.' It allowed the organisations to show funders that the program is working. And finally, mentors learned to set goals at the right level with their mentees and to use the SMART framework.

Some of the critical comments made by the mentors related to the need for a reasonable time-frame to allow sufficient development in the relationship to show progress. They would have preferred a longer interval of six months. They also pointed out that some mentees were too young to benefit from the process. Some young people may need time to build the relationship with their mentor before engaging in goal setting like this. Others felt that their relationship with their mentee was 'too delicate' to engage in this type of evaluation process or that some mentees were frightened or uncomfortable with the process of setting and scoring goals. A few mentors did not have frequent enough contact with their mentees or felt that the program required too much paperwork.

Overall, the GAS pilot was a success. The data collected showed significant changes in the mentees' progress towards achieving their goal, suggesting that with refinement, this process would be a useful and valid evaluation tool of mentoring relationships. The study illuminated several issues surrounding the use of goal setting as part of the mentoring relationship, its limitations and how it could be refined. The questionnaire results highlighted the opinions of the mentors as to how useful this process could be to their mentoring. Future research should examine how much training is required by both mentors and mentees in order to improve goal attainment. Instructional procedures should also provide better guidelines for rating the difficulty of the goals.

Research may furthermore help clarify what type of mentoring relationships may not be suitable for this process. Perhaps youth with serious emotional problems need to focus on building supportive relationships with their mentors before they consider pursuing other goals.

To conclude, the GAS process proved to be a vital part of the relationship, helping clarify mentees' strengths and weaknesses and transforming the expectations and roles of both mentors and mentees. The process may also allow for assessment of naturally occurring mentoring relations that are often short-term and driven by concrete goals.

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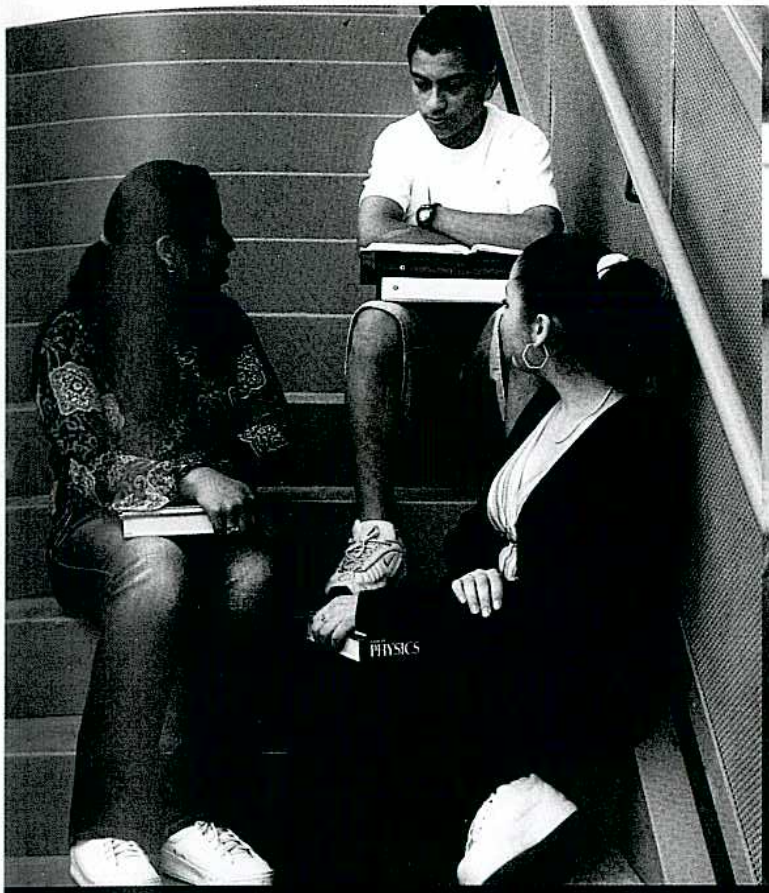
Note

1 Weighted Goal Attainment Score = Goal attainment score x [1.5(degree of difficulty score + level of importance score) + 2.5 (level of functioning score)].



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